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SMITH'S

MAGAZINE

SEPT., 1909

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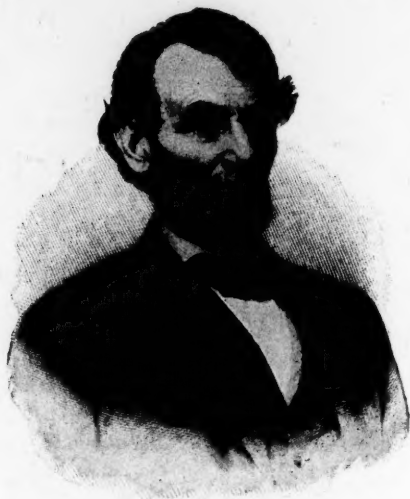


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Vol. IX

No. 6

SMITH'S MAGAZINE

A PUBLICATION FOR THE HOME

SEPTEMBER

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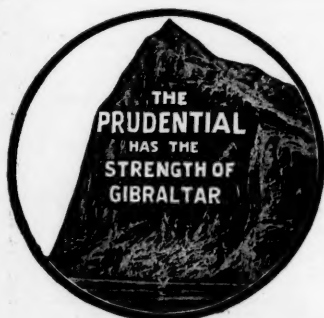
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SMITH'S MAGAZINE

VOLUME 9

SEPTEMBER, 1909

NUMBER 6

PHOTOGRAPHIC ART STUDIES of STAGE FAVORITES



PHOTO BY
MOFFETT,
CHICAGO

MISS GRACE LANE
in "A Stubborn Cinderella"



MISS ROZALINE WRIGHT
In "The Candy Shop"

Photo: Ly Mottet, Chicago





MISS VIRGINIA HILTON
In "The Candy Shop"

Photo by Moffett, Chicago



MISS GERTRUDE DUFFY
In "The Candy Shop"

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MISS ROZALINE WRIGHT
In 'The Candy Shop'

Photo by Mallett, Chicago



MISS MARGUERITE CLARK
In "The Beauty Spot"

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In "The Midnight Sons"

Photo by Bangs, N. Y.



MISS BLANCHE RING
In "The Midnight Sons"

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MISS LULU GLASER
In "Mlle. Mischief"

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MISS EDNA PHILLIPS
In Vaudeville

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MISS ALICE JOHNSON
In "The Man from Home"

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MISS CHARIDAH SIMPSON
In Vaudeville

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MISS WINONA WINTERS
In Vaudeville



MISS M. LONGFELLOW
In "The Great John Ganton"

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MISS CROSBY LITTLE
In "Going Some"

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MISS GLADYS WYNNE
In "The Servant in the House"

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MISS CLARA PALMER
In "Havana"

Photo by Hange, N. Y.



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MISS MAXINE ELLIOTT
In "The Chaparon"

Photo by Sarony, N. Y.



St. George and the Dragon

By Virginia Middleton

ILLUSTRATED BY R. EMMETT OWEN

CHAPTER I.

MY dear cousin," protested Mr. Randolph Fitzhugh, "you do me an injustice! Surely you ought to know me well enough to realize that I would be the last man in the world to deprive any of you dear women of your toys. Only——"

"Toys!" exclaimed Rita Chambers hotly. "That's just it! That's just your insufferable attitude. That's—— Good gracious, Randy, do tell the man again that Ellena Street is two blocks west of Carminia, and three below the Bleecker Street elevated station."

Mr. Fitzhugh obediently raised the hansom's trapdoor of communication with the driver.

"Perhaps you'd better tell him yourself, Rita. I might blunder somewhere in stating that mathematical problem."

Mrs. Chambers, annoyance not altogether suppressed in her voice, gave the

directions again. The driver repeated them as one who puts a hard task upon understanding and memory; the trap fell again and the hansom changed its course.

"It's a remarkable thing," grumbled Mrs. Chambers, "that Haskins' men should not know the city streets! I wonder where he gets his drivers—at the Ellis Island landing, or where! They seem to know about as much of New York as one might expect of a newly arrived Slav. I shall ask Irving to speak to Haskins when he pays the bill this month."

"Oh, come now, Rita! You'll admit that this Ellena Street address is a little out of the beaten line of travel for a respectable uptown liveryman."

"They ought to know New York," tersely declared the lady. "And a street like Ellena Street is, unfortunately, much more typically New York than West Seventy-second."

"You've caught the lingo, all right," observed her cousin in tones half admiring, half disgusted.

"Randolph," she begged him, with sudden intensity, "for Heaven's sake drop your abominable air of skepticism, criticism, conservatism—whatever your air is—before we reach the Benson Memorial House. Remember, please, that the men and women you will meet there are devoting their lives to the amelioration—"

"Amelioration! Hear her!"

"Of their fellows. Please respect their earnestness—even though you haven't any yourself!"

"My dear Rita, please remember that your mother brought me up, and remembering that fact, recall that I am not likely to be rude to my hosts in their own house—even if they are such impersonal hosts as a tribe of settlement workers, and their house is such an impersonal one as an institution supported by the charitable public."

"Well, you will admit that you are very trying and alarming, with your antediluvian notions. And I do want you to be nice!"

"Oh, I'll be as 'nice' as natural limitations will permit. Still, you won't ask me to be a hypocrite to the extent of pretending to think that a little bunch of sentimental young ladies is better employed on your unspeakable Ellena Street than they would be in their own homes. Good heavens, Rita! What's this?"

The cab had drawn up before a house which put the passer-by in mind of the fact that Ellena Street had been the quiet abode of elegance and dignified prosperity in the days before the tenement had invaded it, and the factory preëmpted half its area. Just now the sidewalk before the house swarmed with children in all stages of dirt and dilapidation. The early June evening, lit by the last of the sunset and the first of the street lamps, revealed them impishly crowding at the carriage steps, blocking the approach to the Benson Memorial House. They were uttering various comments, for the most part rather friendly and flattering,

upon the guests who mounted to the old-fashioned door. Two or three coachmen, not yet educated to the proper fashionable appreciation of the congested districts, exchanged such meaning glances as the twilight allowed with one another.

"It's the children of the neighborhood," replied Rita, as she alighted. "Poor infants! They're always excited when there are carriages for anything but a funeral."

"It looked like a crowd of gamins waiting to see a notorious prisoner emerge from the Tombs," said Fitzhugh. "It gave me a feeling of having done something infamous."

The paneled door swung open before them. They found themselves in a wide hall, with a glimpse of drawing-rooms to the right, of dining room beyond, and mahogany-railed stairs ascending. The usual dinner effect was produced. Fitzhugh was conscious of flowers, of pretty frocks, of the delicate animation which precedes a feast. The man who had opened the door directed him to the men's dressing room; Rita ascended the stairs with an air of familiarity. It was all altogether different from what he had expected, this dinner at the Benson Memorial Settlement which celebrated the installation as headworker of Miss Hilda St. George.

He had been annoyed during the drive down from his cousin's by the conviction that he was being dragged to a vegetarian banquet, or other "fad," given by young women with straight-drawn hair, clad in high-necked woolen gowns. He himself was not an originally invited guest, but merely the substitute for his cousin's husband, who had been called suddenly from the city, and who had laid stern, unenlightened, masculine commands upon his wife not to venture into Ellena Street without the protecting escort of a man of her own family. And now Fitzhugh found himself almost as much annoyed to find how mistaken his premonitions had been as he would have been to discover them true prophecies.

"Evening dresses and candlelight in a fine old house with solid mahogany

doors!" he grumbled as he gave a look at his necktie. "It's a pleasing way to 'ameliorate' the conditions of the poor!"

Emerging into the corridor, he rejoined Rita, who glanced at him apprehensively.

"Now remember!" she whispered. "Be nice! Irving's always perfectly silent when I succeed in dragging him here—but they regard him as a sort of dear, quaint curiosity. But you—you couldn't escape in any such fashion. You look too young and alert and—self-satisfied. So they wouldn't consider you a fossil—merely a socially uneducated person. Promise!"

He bent his gray eyes upon her with a look of affectionate amusement.

"I'll try not to disgrace you, Rita—but I shan't be a hypocrite."

Then he found that they were entering the big, old-fashioned drawing-room and were pausing before a young woman who immediately aroused every atom of antagonism of which he was capable.

"Miss St. George, this is my cousin, Mr. Fitzhugh, whom you were good enough to accept as Mr. Chambers' substitute to-night. My poor husband was quite desolated not to be here to congratulate you and the settlement upon your accession to the headworkship."

The young woman, who smiled and murmured conventionally polite rejoinders to Mrs. Chambers' greetings and introductions, met Fitzhugh's eyes almost upon a level, although he was a tall man. She carried her tall figure beautifully; her neck and shoulders rose out of the plain décolletage of her gray frock with a classic perfection. Her face was handsome rather than beautiful, the young man decided; the dark coloring was lovely, the dark hair grew in lovely curves about the well-shaped forehead, the eyebrows lay two delicate black lines over the sparkling brown eyes. But the expression of independence, of utter self-assurance, which the young lady wore, marred, in her critic's eyes, all the charms of color and contour. Even her splendid look of animation was not the result of the delib-

erate, coquettish vivacity which he regarded as a natural and desirable feminine quality, but something impersonal, remote.

Miss St. George had told him, in perfunctory phrase, how glad the residents of the Benson Memorial House were to accept him in place of his cousin's husband. Mrs. Chambers had turned to speak to an acquaintance, and Randolph saw his fate advancing upon him in the shape of a constantly smiling young woman with light, curly hair. He decided to hold that destiny at bay by any means for a few minutes, having been seized with an instant aversion for the light-haired one. He stood planted before Miss St. George; there were no newcomers behind him to take his place at once, and he was determined to bring a light of true recognition of his presence—not this hostess' absent-minded civility—into her impersonally glowing eyes.

"Do you know," he said, "I am receiving shocks of surprise at every second? This is my first visit to a settlement, you see—and I had expected a dinner of herbs, prepared and served by the fair settlers themselves. I had expected the plainest surroundings—not brasses and candlelight and flowers and French frocks. And I had looked for absolute truth in word and act—for instance, that you would say to Rita and me, not what you so courteously did say, but something to this effect: 'Of course, my dear Mrs. Chambers, I am glad to see you, and I am glad that you are provided with an escort, since that is considered essential by your husband, but as to whether you brought him or another, it makes not the slightest difference to me, any more than it does what driver you have on your carriage box.' Wouldn't that have been nearer the unvarnished truth, Miss St. George, than all the graceful things you murmured to my cousin Rita and me?"

He had succeeded in calling a look of direct, personal interest into Miss St. George's clear eyes, at any rate. At first it was a challenging look; then it changed, to his chagrin, to an indiffer-

ently amused one. He noticed also that her eyes ran a whole octave of browns in color, being luminously amber-like for the second when angry question had shone in them, and darkening to their ordinary rich chestnut brown as the cooler mood succeeded.

"Where have you been living to have acquired such amazing notions of settlements?" She laughed lightly. "I must have you taught better at once. Miss Vaughan, at whose right you are going to sit at dinner, will begin her instructions immediately. Katherine," her eyes summoned the light-haired girl hovering near her elbow, "this is Mr. Fitzhugh, Mrs. Irving Chambers' cousin. Do tell him that a settlement is not any species of madhouse."

So she dismissed him, moving forward a step to greet a white-whiskered capitalist whom Fitzhugh recognized, and his stout, amiably smiling and amiably exclaiming wife.

"You aren't a New Yorker, then?" gurgled Miss Vaughan, evidently delighted at the opportunity to make a convert to the cause for which she thought she stood.

This irritated Fitzhugh again. He had felt himself something of a small celebrity. Had he not come to New York, under somewhat sensational circumstances two years before, to defend a Richmond man accused of crime? And had not his defense been sensationally brilliant, as well as successful? And had he not received many flattering offers to make connections in the metropolis? And was it entirely unknown to this ignorant young woman that he had been invited by the district attorney to take a vacancy in his staff, and that he had done so, and had continued to acquit himself with as great distinction in the prosecution of crime as he had in its defense? However, he could not say all this to Miss Vaughan.

"Only by adoption," he replied with such grace as he could muster. "I'm from Richmond."

"Oh, a Southerner!"

"Your geography is perfect," he assured her.

"That accounts for your not knowing

anything of settlements or civic improvement in general," she told him, with exquisite tact.

"You regard everything below Mason and Dixon's line as hopelessly unprogressive, then?" He thought, as he spoke, that it was a pity she did not take a lesson in carriage from the headworker; her poor, undressed little neck rose so awkwardly from her pink muslin ruffles. He turned to look again at Miss St. George.

"Well—I don't mean to be rude." She flushed in her embarrassment. "But— isn't it?"

"Have you ever been to Richmond?" he asked her. "No? I thought not. When you come, Miss Vaughan, you will find that the city has its own problems and that it is doing its humble best to solve them in a fashion acceptable to civilization."

The movement toward the dining room began. Fitzhugh smiled a trifle sardonically as he saw the capitalist seated with great deference at Miss St. George's right hand.

"I see that you young ladies are not censorious enough to exclude Mr. Grimshaw from your feasts because of those ugly little investigations into his company's complicity with the X. Y. and Z.'s rebating system."

"Mr. Grimshaw?" repeated Miss Vaughan. "Why, he's one of our largest contributors. We wanted him for president of our board of trustees—but he wouldn't take it. He's one of the vice-presidents, though."

About the young Southerner's mouth the almost constant line of cynical amusement deepened a little. Hilda St. George, looking down the long, brilliantly lighted table, caught his expression, and the prompt antagonism she had felt for him when his cousin had presented him to her surged up again in her. What was Katherine Vaughan saying, she wondered, to make him look like that? Katherine was something of a simpleton, anyway! She wished that she had put him next to Barbara Longfellow—Barbara was not a stupid little goose. Then she wondered why on earth she should worry concerning the

opinion Rita Vaughan's cousin chose to entertain about the work of the Benson Memorial House.

She tried to dismiss annoyance and to do her obvious duty, which was to interest old man Grimshaw in her scheme for a neighborhood gymnasium. She heard one of the masculine workers affiliated with the settlement talking with much volubility, if not with great eloquence, to Mrs. Grimshaw on the same subject—well, Mrs. Grimshaw was a good old soul upon whom very delicate methods would be wasted. She was “Oh-ing” and “Ah-ing” and “Dear-me-ing” quite satisfactorily; still she did not hold the purse strings—it was Grimshaw himself who must be moved. Hilda bent her energies and charms upon the old man, and in the midst of her tactful finessing looked up to flush with anger at the gleam of satirical amusement she saw in Randolph Fitzhugh's eyes, bent upon her across the shaded candles, the flowers, and the dishes.

At one end of the table, one of the girls was telling, with humor, of an encounter she had had that day with Mr. Bernard Maguire in a house visited by affliction.

“Oh, I was routed, horse, foot, and dragoons,” she laughed. “There was the poor boy who had been injured, and here was I with my hard-won permission for him to be treated at the Calvinist Hospital. And there was his mother declaring that never, never, while she lived, should child of hers be taken to ‘one of thim murtherin’ horspitals’; and then enters Mr. Maguire with a doctor and a nurse at his elbow, clean bed linen in a basket, help, cheer, and kindness beaming from his fat face. And at the same instant the dumbwaiter begins to creak with the approach of coal and groceries. Oh, he was a typical Santa Claus, and I really didn't much blame Mrs. Maloney for the way in which she showed me and my hospital advice to the door.”

“Who is this Maguire? He sounds like a very neighborly man,” rumbled Mr. Grimshaw, who had been listening to the story.

“Mr. Maguire is the Other Power on Ellena Street,” chimed in a short, round-faced, spectacled young man who had been entertaining Mrs. Chambers with pleasant dinner-table talk on tuberculosis exhibits. “You know, Miss St. George is one——”

“Oh, spare me! At least make the House share in my responsibilities!” cried Hilda.

“Well, then, the Benson Memorial House is one, or so we fondly like to imagine. And Mr. Bernard Maguire is the other, without any doubt.”

“If he does many such deeds of practical kindness as that which has been described here this evening,” boomed a middle-aged, uptown clergyman, “his power must be a beneficent one.”

“Mr. Maguire is the captain of this block, the Tammany captain,” explained Miss St. George dryly. “And we are to have an election in the fall, you remember. And Mrs. Maloney has one husband, three sons, and a nephew, all voters!”

“Ah, I see!” This from Mr. Grimshaw.

“So Mr. Maguire works for an end,” said Fitzhugh musingly. His eyes challenged his hostess’. “You don't condemn that in itself, do you, Miss St. George?”

A bright, angry color flooded her face; it seemed to her that every one at the long table must see his insolent reference toward her attitude to the millionaire at her right hand.

“Certainly not,” she forced herself to say with as much lightness as she could command. “Only we, here at the House, think that all Mr. Maguire's good is done that evil may come of it.”

“Whereas your evil—granting such a possibility—is done that good may come of it?” The young district attorney shot the question straight at her.

“We deny the evil altogether,” she answered lightly. “We are altogether good.”

“It's a clear case of St. George and the Dragon then—this case of you and Mr. Maguire?”

“Oh, I must disclaim such promise,” cried Hilda, while the others

applauded, and Rita Chambers nervously watched her cousin, fearful of his next conversational contribution. "It's the House that stands against the sort of thing Mr. Maguire and his place stands for."

"His place?" It was Mrs. Grimshaw who spoke. "What is his place?"

"He runs an establishment known as 'The Old Farm.' It is, of course, a saloon," explained Miss St. George.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Grimshaw, "is there much drinking in this neighborhood?"

The young man who had been explaining the itinerary of the tuberculosis exhibit to Mrs. Chambers now devoted his attention to Mrs. Grimshaw, telling her how very openly the curse of drink stalked abroad in the neighborhood of Ellena Street, and proving to her that the only way to lessen its ravages was to establish a gymnasium which would rival it in attractiveness. It was, Hilda thought when she felt Fitzhugh's satirical eyes fixed upon her, almost too patent—Brewster's attempt to lead Mrs. Grimshaw to the gymnasium. She gave the signal for leaving the table rather abruptly, just in time, in fact, to break in upon the young lawyer's question:

"And is Mr. Maguire's saloon as powerful in politics and in social life in the neighborhood as it was ten years ago, before all you kind young ladies, or your predecessors, began work here?"

In the big drawing-room he found himself half unwillingly drawn to Hilda's side the instant the Grimshaws had gone; they claimed the privilege of age, and were the first to leave. The others of the trustees and patrons of the settlement who had been among the diners were scattered through the house, looking at the clubs and classes in the adjoining building, and for a few minutes the girl was alone. He thought of her as a girl at the moment because he caught a glimpse of her drooping a little; her twenty-eight years seemed less dignified, less self-reliant at the moment.

"Do you know, Miss St. George," he

began, "that this is my first visit to any such institution as this? I——"

"Unless you want to make us all very angry," she interrupted gently, "don't call it an institution. It is our home—mine and that of the other residents. We choose that it shall be in a particular neighborhood, and we try to be neighborly to our friends of the region—just as your sisters, if you have any, doubtless do in the vicinity of their home. But we are not an institution."

"You will forgive my inadvertent use of a distasteful term," he said. He looked meaningfully about the handsome, dignified room which had been rescued from whatever dinginess it had fallen upon in these latter days on Ellena Street, and had been restored to its olden estate. "Your—home—is one upon which I must congratulate you."

"I am glad you appreciate its charm," said Hilda frigidly. She burned with resentment at his tone, which seemed to accuse her and her fellows of choosing a too agreeable path of philanthropy.

"Every one must," he conceded cheerfully. "But you speak of it as a home to you and your associates."

"Our home, yes," she interrupted. "But deliberately chosen where we think our living may be of the most service."

"One is forced to the happy conclusion that you all come from homes and neighborhoods which stand in no need whatever of your good services."

She flashed an angry look upon him—it was so familiar a criticism of her work that it attracted to it, by its showy, picturesque quality, young girls who had duties in the homes and the circles to which they were born.

"I think there is no one here," she answered, "whose duty lies very plainly elsewhere."

"Duty? Perhaps not. But, do you know, Miss St. George, I am glad the charm of your undertaking did not fall upon my cousin, Mrs. Chambers, in her impressionable girlhood? Her father and mother did not need her, as you put it, in the sense in which

this neighborhood may need you; that is, they were sound physically, and had been instructed in the rudiments of hygiene and ethics. But their days would have been very lonely ones if she had left them. Isn't there a need of the affections which demands some consideration from even the most advanced altruist?"

"Did not your cousin marry before the death of her parents and leave them then to the loneliness of which you speak so touchingly?"

"She did—she left them at the one great call that should have precedence over the call of filial love," he answered.

"You are deliciously out of date," she told him flippantly. "I almost look to see you with a stock about your throat and the general habiliments of the early nineteenth century."

"I am old-fashioned, I confess, in my ideas of women and my ideals of them."

She measured him with flashing, amber-yellow eyes for an instant. He bore the scrutiny with quiet amusement.

"Well, I know what the man with old-fashioned ideals of womanhood desires," she retorted. "He wants a slave on his own hearth, and a coquette in other men's drawing-rooms. Mrs. Chambers should never have brought you here, Mr. Fitzhugh. Here we are all very much concerned about other things than our firesides, our frocks, and our flirtations. Some of us want to vote; I think most of us are neither unable nor unwilling to make a public statement concerning any public matter in regard to which we know anything. We are all as modern as you are—"

"Antediluvian, Rita calls me," he came to her assistance.

She smiled.

"Thank you—antediluvian."

"Of course," he said, after they had measured smiling glances for a second, "if you can show me that Ellena Street is a more savory thoroughfare than it was before you young ladies came down here, I'll admit that there is something to be said in favor of robbing your own homes and your own circles of your beneficent influences."

He paused. She affected to laugh.

"I'll send you our annual report," she promised him.

"I know those veracious documents." He laughed. "Why don't you invite me down for a joint debate some evening, Miss St. George?"

"Do you speak in public? Oh, to be sure—how forgetful of me! You are in the district attorney's office, Mr. Babcock's. No wonder you don't like us or any other agency that makes for enlightenment and progress—and so for gradual decline of the political power to which Mr. Babcock owes his position."

Fitzhugh flushed with annoyance. Then he laughed.

"Upon my word, Miss St. George, you do me an injustice! I had been so ungallant that I never even thought of you amiable young ladies as a power likely to wield vast political influences."

"If only you wouldn't call us 'young ladies'!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, there you are!" cried Rita Chambers' voice. "I thought you were coming with us, Randolph, to inspect the clubs and classes. You might have seen the room where I have my Thursday afternoon class in clay modeling. Why didn't you come?"

"I've been learning all about settlements from Miss St. George," he explained.

"On the contrary, your cousin has been teaching me all about woman's true sphere, Rita," said Miss St. George, smiling. "It was charming—so quaint, like a costume play or a Colonial ball, or something of that sort."

"Only it was not a masquerade," Fitzhugh assured her, extending his hand in farewell. "Good night, and thank you so much for letting me come with my cousin."

"Good night. I hope that Mrs. Chambers will bring you some time again. And as for masquerade"—she replied to some faint taunt she had detected in his voice—"I assure you that I, too, am entirely without pretense in what I have said."

When the door had closed upon them



"Why, mother, you're crazy. Go along home with you."

and upon others of the guests, she turned to little Brewster, who lived in a model tenement two or three doors away.

"Why on earth did Mrs. Chambers bring that insufferable prig of a cousin with her?" she demanded, with unaccustomed petulance.

"Prig?" said little Brewster. "Oh, not so bad as that, is he? Isn't he a pretty able fellow?"

"He's living in the Middle Ages, intellectually, anyway," she retorted.

Brewster, who cherished for her the "desire of the moth for the star," was rather glad of her strictures. He whistled as he strode up the street after his good night.

But Hilda went frowning to her room. Her opinion of her work and of her importance in the community had certainly not been changed by the

impertinences of a chance guest, she assured herself. And the young man, with his antique views, and his perfectly evident belief in the supremacy of the masculine in both nature and society, was of the type which she told herself she particularly loathed. Yet she sat by her window, looking out upon Ellena Street, as it still sprawled on doorsteps and window sills, still played in the gutters and quarreled across fire escapes, still watched for the swinging door at the corner saloon to open and certain awaited figures to stagger forth—and still staggered home—she looked upon the scene that was so familiar to her eyes, and demanded of the night where should a woman find service to do if not here; and then she asked herself again the hateful question the man had asked her: How much had Ellena Street changed in the

years of her service and that of the others whose follower she was?

"It is strange," she told herself as she finally climbed into bed, "how much the distasteful fascinates us. Now that cousin of Rita Chambers is the very sort of man I most abominate. And yet, I go on thinking of him and his waspish criticisms to-night instead of Tim Brewster, or any of the good, kind, faithful men whom I really like, really respect! It's just as one cannot forbear to touch a bruised spot."

Meantime Mr. Fitzhugh had answered his cousin's eager questions as to what he thought of Hilda St. George with terse brutality.

"God deliver us from these meddling, unsexed women!" was his reply. "Don't talk to me of her, Rita. If they weren't so absolutely futile, she and her kind, they'd be dangerous. As it is they're merely rather pitiable and extremely tiresome."

CHAPTER II.

In the interests of her good work, Miss St. George made frequent friends with the mammon of unrighteousness. Indeed it would have been difficult for her to live in New York without finding herself more or less in demand, socially, even if she had not enhanced her value among the novelty seekers by her career. She came of abolitionist stock; her grandfather had been a general in the Civil War after he had helped to bring about that conflict by much speechmaking and the harborage of many a runaway slave. Withal he had been a rich man—one of those born with fortune sufficient to justify them in giving up most of their time to the affairs of their neighbors, as Fitzhugh had told his cousin when she had descended upon the inherited strain of altruism in Hilda.

Hilda's father, being born a little too late to win distinction in the War or in the Abolitionist agitation which had preceded it in his part of the country, did the next most congenial thing possible. He became a typical aristocratic scholar, reaching in due time the chair

at Harvard which one of his ancestors had endowed and another had once filled. Hilda was distinctly well-born, as such matters are reckoned in America. In New York, when she came to uplift that barbarous section of her native land, her Puritan aristocracy might not have counted as important, socially. But she gave the needed fillip to curiosity to know her by forswearing her own circle and going to live in what the Sunday papers called "the slums." Instantly all the small lion hunters who had any acquaintance with her family went to see her and told her how noble she was, and how courageous—wasn't she afraid of contagious diseases or drunken men or anything?—and said that she really must make an exception of them in the matter of uptown visits; of course, they understood the engrossing nature of her mission, but she simply must come to them sometimes, for a little relaxation.

At first, before practical philanthropy had made her a diplomat of parts and had taught her the need of the class grouped as "uptowners," she was a little inclined to fight shy of their invitations and their lionizing. But as the needs of the Benson Memorial House grew and grew, while Ellena Street seemed to remain at a perpetual standstill, she came to see the importance of wide and wealthy acquaintance, and was frequently to be met in regions very far from those where she was living the neighborly life.

This afternoon she had been at a late musicale and tea at Mrs. Duryea's given, despite the theory that there was "no one in town," for an old friend of the hostess who had just come home from studying the violin under Ysaye. Now Mrs. Duryea's motor car, under the able guidance of Mrs. Duryea's French chauffeur, was conveying her to Ellena Street. Her thoughts, however, were far from either Ellena Street or Mrs. Duryea's half-filled drawing-rooms. They were persistently upon a wide-verandaed Southern house. A path, lined with tall box bushes, led to the open front door. By it sat an old lady—one of the old ladies who, Hilda

impatiently told herself, belonged to the past and must give way to quite a new type of old lady. This one was white-haired, smiling, gentle; she sat upon a rocker, and she knitted. And somehow the look of her was as fragrant as old-fashioned roses.

The picture had been in Randolph Fitzhugh's hands when Hilda had come upon him. She had been rather surprised to find him in Mrs. Duryea's house, but the picture had explained it.

"See," he had said to her, holding out the old piece of cardboard eagerly, "see—it is a picture of Cousin Rita's mother—my Aunt Virginia. She and Mrs. Duryea's mother were great cronies; they went to the same boarding school and were friends all their lives—as long as Aunt Virgie lived. Mrs. Ritter"—he indicated Mrs. Duryea's mother, exquisite and sparkling and frail, wearing her black silk and her point lace as few women know how to wear them nowadays—"has just been so good as to send to her room and find it for me. Isn't she a dear?"

It had all amazed Hilda—the quick talk like a boy's talk, the sure expectation of her understanding. And still more was she amazed at the prompt response she gave him, at the instant rush of sympathy she had felt. The dear old lady in the picture was one to love, and she found herself glad that the disagreeable guest of the evening before had had the heart to give the dear old lady love. She had said something, not conventional, but sincere and cordial, about the photograph, and he had looked at her with gratitude.

"You know, Aunt Virgie raised me," he explained. "My own mother died when I was a very little shaver. But—Aunt Virgie never let me know the difference." He paused and studied the old photograph again with lingering glances. Then he suddenly laughed, quite a spontaneous, boyish laugh, unlike his grim mirth of the night before.

"I dare say you are thinking you can see where I found my ideal of womanhood—my antediluvian ideal?" he said.

Hilda smiled and returned the picture.

"One can no longer altogether blame you," she was moved to say, with some graciousness.

It was of this trifling talk that she was thinking as the automobile turned into Ellena Street, to the inevitable admiring excitement of the children. But Hilda noticed that a group in front of a house near the corner did not turn to look at the unaccustomed glory of equipage. There was a clamor in the midst of the crowd, and she leaned forward to bid the chauffeur slow down. Then she listened and looked more closely, and some of the children swarmed over to the puffing monster.

"Oh, teacher!" they cried, using the title almost invariably bestowed upon the Benson Memorial residents. "It's Willie Plaster's mother—she's goin' on somethin' awful. She says he's gamblin' his earnin's away in there—in that house." They nodded with awe and delight toward Number Twenty-seven.

Miss St. George alighted from the automobile and gave its manipulator a tip. Then, as he turned toward the street's outlet, she made her way into the midst of the crowd, which separated to give her admission.

"Mrs. Plaster," she said, touching the woman who stood storming in broken English before the closed door of Number Twenty-seven. "What is the matter? Will you tell me?"

"Dere ist vere he blays der bolicy, mine boy," screamed the woman. "Dere ist vere hiss moneys from die papers alretty go. Und ven dere ist no moneys for der landlord, vat shall I do den? Vat shall I do den?" She shook back and forth in a fury of weeping.

"Are you sure?" began Miss St. George dubiously, looking at the dingy, innocent-seeming front of Twenty-seven. Only a few weeks ago, she remembered, the Italian woman who had kept a cheap, swarming lodging house there had been dispossessed. She had had a dim impression that no one had moved in since.

"Am I sure? Bud I watches Villie. Dis ist der blace—*ach Himmel! Ach weh! Können Sie do nichts, Fräulein?*" she ended suddenly.

"I will certainly see if you are right," began Miss St. George, when a man came running from the corner toward the excited group.

"What yer all blockin' my way into my house for?" he demanded belligerently. "What the hell d'ye mean makin' a row like this here?"

"Is this your house?" began Miss St. George, with decision. "Yes? Well, this woman, Mrs. Plaster, has the impression that it's a policy shop and that her boy is gambling inside."

The man gave a quick, sidelong glance at the exquisitely dressed, beautiful young lady.

"She has, has she? Well, she's got bats in her belfry."

"Hi! Here comes the cop!" shouted the children as a portly, leisurely figure turned into the street. It paused, in friendly fashion, before the door of the Old Farm, where Mr. Maguire was at the moment sitting, enjoying the June sunshine. The policeman and the block captain said a few words together. Then the former ambled toward the house before which the crowd was growing larger, and the uproar more noisy.

"Get 'long out of this," he commanded the children, enforcing the order with some roughness. "Now, what's the trouble here?"

Mrs. Plaster began to tell him, more in German than in English. The tenant of the house began to explain, more in profanity than in ordinary language. The children, crowding back, began to shrill their knowledge of the affair. Hilda waited a favorable break in the clamor and told him in a few words.

"Why, mother, you're crazy. Go along home with you. This ain't a policy joint. This gentleman don't run any such place. Now you go along home."

"*Nimmer, nimmer,*" shrieked the woman. "I tell you, oben der door—go to der insides of dot house und dere vill you find mine boy. *Ja*, und odder boys."

"She's clean dippy," declared the man who had claimed Number Twenty-seven as his abode.

"Come now, ain't I tellin' you you're wrong, mother?" demanded the policeman, with less suavity than he had used at first. "If you don't get along out of this—kickin' up a rumpus before a man's house over nothin'—I'll have to run you in. If your boy ain't doin' right by you, you make a charge against him an' I'll see that he gets a chance to explain to the judge—"

"*Ach!*" screamed Mrs. Plaster. But the covert threat of punishment to her boy had its due effect. She turned reluctantly from the steps that led to the front door of Number Twenty-seven. She shook her fist at it in leaving.

"Would it be out of the question, officer," said Hilda gently, "to put her mind at rest by showing her that her suspicions have no foundation? Surely, this man, if his house is not used for some illegal purpose"—she added sharply—"would not object to setting her right?"

"It wouldn't do, lady," declared Roundsman Keating. "What's to hinder any crazy old dame from raisin' a rumpus in front of any house an' demandin' to get in? What's to hinder her from sayin' that all you young ladies over at the kindergarten there"—to Keating's mind the settlement was altogether a kindergarten because he was constantly steering little children over the crossing toward it in the morning—"are runnin' a policy shop or an opium joint or anything that she hits on in her batty old head, 'an' askin' me to let her in, day or night, to see? No, miss. That ain't no way to do things."

"I only thought the man here might be willing to waive his strict rights to privacy in order to reassure a worried mother," said Hilda. "Of course, I know that a man's house may not be searched without a warrant."

"That it can't, lady!" agreed the tenant of Number Twenty-seven with emphasis, and the conference was over.

Hilda went slowly toward the settlement. The work always depressed her more in the spring than during the winter. It seemed to her that much which was noisome lay hid during the

cold weather, but oozed out into the light of day when the sun warmed the streets. Squalor, vice, and wretchedness no longer locked themselves behind doors and windows, but spilled out upon doorsteps and window sills, dawdled at corners, slept upon fire escapes. The question which Fitzhugh had put to her so rudely last night—the question as to how much good the settlement had accomplished in the years of its activity—seemed on days like this to have a most discouraging answer. And if Mrs. Plaster was right, if a new evil had sprung up for her to fight, where was she to find the energy, the hope, with which to fight it? Drunkenness she had been long familiar with; three of the four corners of her own particular block were given over to saloons; Mr. Maguire's Old Farm was the most gorgeous of these, but not the only one. In the alleys off the street other vice lurked, more horrible even than drunkenness to the girl's mind. And now, if in the very midst of her people a new institution of the devil were established—a place to make the miserably poor more poor and more miserable, to tempt the weak to dishonesty, to goad the wretched to despair—if this were true, what could she do to thwart, to counteract its influence?

CHAPTER III.

It was Maggie Hanlon who capped with final authority the rumors which blew into the settlement during the first month of the summer concerning Number Twenty-seven. If Hilda felt toward all the neighborhood waves of that consecrated passion of possession which all clergymen and reformers must have to be effective workers—that passion which makes them think of their charges as "my people"—she had it especially toward the members of a certain girls' club. When she had first come to the Benson Memorial House, four years ago, that club of girls, ranging from thirteen to sixteen years old, had been put in her charge. Twice a week she had met them in

the settlement; half of each of those evenings had been devoted to imparting useful knowledge to them, half to their entertainment. She had visited them in their homes. She had let them know that she was always ready for their service as far as her capabilities went. With them there was no touch of that unconscious pride, that arrogance of bearing, which sometimes made her a difficult companion for those whom the world called her equals.

And the girls had responded to her by giving her a very genuine affection. She had helped to steer them through the difficult years of the change from girlhood to womanhood, she had advised them concerning their frocks and those whom they called their "fellers"; she had given them counsel as to their behavior in shop and factory, in church and home; and now that they were young women she looked upon them with a sort of jealous pride as largely her own handiwork. As her advance toward the headworkmanship, with its manifold executive and—she sometimes bitterly called them "advertising"—duties, made her actual "neighborly" work less and less, she still retained her club. She had been bridesmaid at one of the girl's weddings and had stood godmother to another's first baby. No wonder that she felt the club near and dear to her.

Maggie Hanlon was perhaps the girl of whom she was fondest—a wide-eyed, honest, gentle creature, dependable to the last ditch, quietly humorous, intensely devoted. Maggie, after her mother's death, had uncomplainingly mothered her brood of little sisters and brothers, had kept house for her father, had worked in a Sixth Avenue store, and still had found time to be friendly with half the girls on the block. A few months ago, her father had married again, and half of Maggie's duties were taken from her. She had promptly proceeded to make new ones for herself by falling in love with Neil Blake, the handsomest of the young amateur athletes of the street, winning, weak, idle. She had even been so blinded by her affections as

to be humbly grateful to Neil for returning them, and she had been "proud as a queen," as she herself said when she could tell Hilda that she and Neil were to be married in the fall.

And when July dawned upon steaming, malodorous Ellena Street, Maggie had a pallor which was not due altogether to the heat or the regulations of the Sixth Avenue emporium in which she worked. The bubbling gayety she had shown for some time after confiding her happy secret to Hilda had disappeared. Hilda, watching her as occasion permitted, worried a little.

"Lovers' quarrel?" she said to Maggie one Sunday afternoon when she found the girl drooping listlessly upon the steps of her father's tenement, when neighborhood usage would have commanded that she and Neil be off pleasuring together. Maggie flushed as she shook her head.

"Not exactly," she had answered. And then, remorsefully: "But it ain't my fault that we haven't had one; Neil's real patient with me. But I can't learn not to find fault with him when I know he's over there to Willett's."

"Willett's?" repeated Hilda.

Maggie looked at her a little wonderingly. It was something she never ceased to find amazing—the ignorance of the ladies at the settlement of the things that were going on "under their very noses."

"Yes—at Number Twenty-seven. Didn't you know? It's a policy shop. He's got the first floor fitted up now for pool—but the pool's a blind. It's policy and the races and a wheel they play upstairs. No bet too little to accept. Lord, Miss St. George, it's awful. Even the little bits of fellers—the newbies and the blackies—trot in with their pennies. An' Neil—Neil keeps sayin' to me: 'What's ten cents when it gives you a chance to win five thou? Wouldn't you have no use for five thou, Mag?' An' over he goes with every cent he can rake or scrape together. You know we was savin' for—the fall. He was givin' me so much out of his pay envelope every

Satiddy to keep for him. Well, I never knew what was goin' on until he slipped up on that three weeks in succession. But he takes my scoldin's an' my maddin's awful sweet, Miss St. George."

"Neil has a very good temper," agreed Hilda. She was a little 'dazed by the revelations of the girl. That all this could go on in sight of her front windows and she be not only powerless but ignorant!

"I'll see what I can do," she promised tersely.

"Oh, there ain't nothin' to be done," answered Maggie, with the listless fatalism of the experienced. "Willett's a friend of Maguire, they say, an' you know that Mr. Maguire has his way on this block. It seems right enough, too," she added, "for he is certainly a friend in trouble."

"It would be more to the purpose if he were a friend before trouble came," declared Hilda vigorously.

She went on to the settlement. The window boxes in its windows were green and flowering. The muslin curtains waved gently behind them. She knew how cool and grateful the stately old rooms with their finely chosen, simple furnishings would seem; but, thinking of Willett's, of Maggie drooping on the tenement door sill, of handsome, weak, reckless Neil throwing away money, threatening the girl's happiness, of Maguire, big, burly, incarnate selfishness and greed despite that specious neighborliness of his which had made the street his own—when she thought of these, the pleasant quiet and repose of the house seemed only an indication of its utter futility. What more did it and its residents do to make life in the neighborhood sweet and wholesome than the sisterhood around the corner who combatted evil with much prayer and no more militant weapon?

In the drawing-room she found, to her surprise, Randolph Fitzhugh.

"I did not know when you were likely to be least busy, and so most at leisure to waste time upon barbarians like me," he told her. "But I thought that

Sunday afternoon would be the best time to try my chances. All the neighborhood, I'm sure, is having mixed-ale parties on the fire escape—except the lovers, who have all gone to Coney Island."

She smiled dispiritedly and asked him, irrelevantly, how his cousin was.

"Very well, I think. And where," he added, looking sharply at her, "you yourself ought to be, Miss St. George. You look very tired. Aren't you going into the country soon? Don't you ever take any rest?"

"Oh, yes—nearly three whole months of it!" she assured him. "This year I think it will be only two, however, for I want to be in town when the campaign opens. Our Women's Municipal League is going to be busy in support of Mr. Winslow if the good government people and the Republicans coalesce upon him. Oh, I keep forgetting! You, of course, being of Mr. Babcock's staff, are naturally on the other side."

"Being a Virginian," he corrected her somewhat coldly, "I am naturally a Democrat."

"But the Democratic Party must be a very different party in New York City from what it is in Virginia. I should think you'd hate the vulgar associations with it here."

"My politics are based upon principles," he informed her, "not upon my personal likes and dislikes. Though, if you come to that, I have yet to learn that Tammany has a monopoly of the vulgar in this city."

"No, of course not," she assented, with sudden vagueness—she was looking through the windows and saw a group of boys in their Sunday clothes enter Number Twenty-seven.

"So you are going to work actively for the good governmenters," he remarked.

The door of Twenty-seven had closed upon the group and she turned her eyes toward her caller. They sparkled with an angry determination to which he, of course, did not hold the explanation.

"I do, indeed," she declared. "Just as far as my trustees will let me, as

the head of this institu—" she caught the quizzical gleam in his eyes and bit off the obnoxious word—"this settlement, I am going to work for the good government cause."

"I'm afraid you're beaten beforehand," he told her, still smiling over her verbal misadventure.

"You give me," she retorted, "additional desire for victory, additional vigor for the campaign."

"Do you mean that you are going to—to—speak—and all that, yourself?" he asked, with horror replacing the bland amusement of his manner.

"I shall speak and I shall preach. I shall make the lives of my men friends a burden, reminding them to get out and register, entreating them to get out and vote. I shall bring their wives down here and shall show them what the present sort of government means to the poor. I shall invite men of our side to speak from that balcony there." She nodded toward the narrow, iron-railed porch that overhung the English basement of the house. "I shall be as unwomanly, according to your definition, as I know how to be. Tell me," she added impertinently, "if all this effort of mine were to be expended upon your side, would it seem so monstrous to you?"

"It would be so distasteful to me," he returned, "that I should want to withdraw from a party which employed such methods."

"You are very severe."

"You asked me a question which I have answered."

They stared defiantly at each other for a second. Then she spoke.

"Why did you come to see me, Mr. Fitzhugh? To quarrel with me?"

"To make a dinner call. I dined here within a fortnight," he reminded her coldly.

"Ah! But only as a substitute, you remember. I should have absolved you entirely if you had not called."

"Besides, as a matter of fact, I wanted very much to see you again," he added, with sudden honesty.

"Why? You have managed to tell me, on the two other occasions on which

we have met, that you dislike my kind of woman very heartily indeed. Isn't it a little inconsistent in you to want to see me?"

"Ycur kind of a woman, yes—perhaps. But"—he looked at her, and the blood rushed into her face at the look—"but not you."

"Probably not me," she said, with a brave air of indifference for all her heightened color, "as you really scarcely know me well enough to give me a personal dislike; but my kind so thoroughly that it is really a waste of time for us to see anything of each other. You are a man, I take it," she went on, "bent on accomplishing your own success in the world—"

"Quite bent upon it, I assure you, and regarding the fullest development of my own talents as no contemptible ambition."

"While I," she went on as though he had not interrupted her, "regard your ambition as merely selfish, as merely—you will forgive a harsh word—vulgar. The man whom I like, whom I admire, in whose society I feel pleasure, is the man who cares more for the poor and the wretched, the sick and suffering and despised, than for any success of his own."

"Your ideal man must have inherited a pretty considerable income from his father not to become a public charge," he replied flippantly.

"Of course, I do not mean an idle sentimentalist," she said impatiently. "A man must be self-supporting either by his inheritance or by his labors; but that must be a minor matter with him—his real work in the world must be to help the lowly, to establish justice and—"

"My dear girl," he cried impatiently, "you are surely intelligent enough to know that you are talking rot. There is one service which a man may render his fellows—which he must render them, if he is to play the man; he must do his own work in the world and do it with all his strength. If he's a genius, he must develop the gift which he has; if he's a hod-carrier, he must carry the hod and give the world an example

of a good workman. It isn't given to one man or woman in ten thousand to be a genius in philanthropy."

Hilda was looking through the window again. She held the curtain back now with a little smile.

"There goes a gentleman whose views exactly coincide with yours, I fancy," she said.

Fitzhugh looked out across her shoulder. Mr. Maguire, stout, pale from much indoor living, with gray eyebrows beetling above cold, sharp eyes, clad in broadcloth, was ambling along with a henchman at his elbow. Fitzhugh smiled.

"The Other Power of Ellena Street, my prophetic soul tells me. Don't be too angry with me if I add that I think I see the successful power of Ellena Street, and," he continued steadily, in spite of the anger in her eyes, "if I add that I think it will be better in the long run for Ellena Street that it should be so, because it is better that men should attend to their own work in the world than that women should do it for them; better that the 'masses,' as you may call them, should work out their own salvation than that it should be handed to them by the classes."

"We won't concern ourselves with the ultimate question of government," she said. Her eyes were blazing yellow and her face was pale with an anger that she declared to herself to be witless, but that she could not control. "We won't go beyond the returns of the next election! Will you be magnanimous enough to come and congratulate me on my triumph—I mean the triumph of a decent cause—on the Wednesday after the first Monday in November?"

"You may count upon me—if your side wins," he told her, and bowed himself out.

CHAPTER IV.

In pursuance of her plan for saving Ellena Street from the baleful influence of Number Twenty-seven, Miss St. George directed her steps the next day to the precinct station. It was not her first visit to the place, and the captain

received her with the warmth and graciousness of an old friend. What could he do for her? What could he do for the young ladies of the Benson Memorial House? He lived to do their pleasure—which was not to be wondered at, he added as an afterthought, since all their aims were those which a man and a citizen, especially a sworn officer of justice, must hold as his own.

Hilda was not a fool, of course. She listened to the captain with the pleased smile of belief, but her mind was questioning how she could force him to do his duty. However, she allowed none of her distrust and guile to appear, and said, with a warmth almost equal to his own: "Thank you. I knew that we had only to appeal to you."

The captain grew a trifle cautious. "As far as I can assist you," he amended his visitor's certainties, "I most emphatically shall."

"I want a policy shop and gambling place 'across the street from us shut up," declared Hilda, boldly plunging into her discourse. "It's ruining some of my boys."

Policy shop? Gambling house? Surely, surely, Miss St. George must be mistaken, must have been deceived. Ellena Street was a singularly law-abiding place, the captain knew. That part of a roundsman's beat was a pleasant stroll through the most peaceful surroundings. What had led Miss St. George to believe that a gambling place existed there?

Miss St. George stated her reasons for her belief. The captain shook his head and smiled.

"Mothers and sweethearts!" he sighed. "They're awfully notional people, those two, Miss St. George. Whatever happens, they must be blaming some one besides their precious boys. These women you tell me of—good women, too, I'll take my word—they're disappointed in their boys; it won't do for them to say 'the boys are gamblin'.' No, they've got to fix the blame on some one—and they take this house, because they don't happen to know the tenant, and they say that that's responsible for the boys' faults. I'm pretty

sure that if the boys of your clubs—fine things for our boys and young men, too, Miss St. George, those clubs of yours—if they're gamblin' and playin' the ponies and makin' fools of themselves generally, it ain't so near home. It ain't in this precinct!"

Miss St. George listened with due gravity to the captain, and said that very likely he was right; but would he mind having the place watched? The captain certainly would! And he thanked Miss St. George for telling him what she had. If all citizens were as vigilant as the young ladies at the settlement, his work would not be so difficult.

Whereupon Hilda went home and bethought her how to help the captain obtain evidence against Willett. It would be easy enough, of course, to have some ally of her own get into the place, and buy policy slips, and then to lay the information before the police. But Hilda knew that any such course would not make for the popularity of the settlement in the neighborhood. It would be an offense against the code. It was a queer, intangible thing, that code; it permitted many shocking things, but it did not permit the existence of the hired informer. And though Hilda's agent would not be hired by gold, Ellena Street would not stop to make fine distinctions. If once the word went out that the young ladies of the Benson Memorial House were using outsiders against the neighborhood, against even the evildoers of the neighborhood, that day the usefulness of the Benson Memorial House would be seriously impaired.

Fate, however, played, though rather sadly, into her hands. That hot, close night, as she sat in the little garden the settlement residents had made them in the back yard, there came one to the basement door, demanding the head-worker with lamentations and much broken English. It was Mrs. Plaster. Her son had been arrested for breaking into "the dago's" coal cellar under Number Forty-two, and robbing that dusky citizen's till. "The dago" had just had Willie arrested; another boy,

implicated in the affair, had turned State's evidence, and Willie had been captured. Would Miss St. George see what could be done?

Brewster, who was in the back yard talking largely about the treatment of the negro in the South, promptly volunteered to be Miss St. George's escort. Led by Mrs. Plaster the party made its doleful way to the night court, where Willie was found blubbering in the hands of his captor, while Tony, the complainant, kept his black eyes closely upon him.

At first, Willie denied all acquaintance with "the guinea's coal cellar"; then he claimed but to have gone there with another boy, whose guilty purposes he had not dreamed; then he admitted having robbed the Italian, but moaned that he had divided fair with Eddie, the informer. And finally the confession culminated in the declaration that he had robbed the coal man in order to buy more policy slips at Willett's. That was why the sum might not be returned to Tony—because it had already been squandered in Willett's by the boy and his companions.

It was a dreary business, winding up fitly in the night court. Hilda still wore the muslin frock she had been wearing in the garden when Mrs. Plaster had come for her. She had hastily pinned a leghorn hat over her dark hair and had caught up a scarf to cover the slight décolletage of her bodice; but



Over Mr. Maguire's face ran a flash that said as plainly as words: "O-ho! So that's it!"

even with these concessions to the conventions of the dingy city, she looked like some one astray from a garden party when she, with Brewster, the weeping Mrs. Plaster, and the sniffing, half-sullen boy, was brought by the policeman into the pitiless glare of the great, barren courtroom. She was singularly without self-consciousness, for so beautiful a woman, and to-night her heartsickness was entirely uncontaminated by any recollection of herself.

The men in the court, the justice behind the desk, the officers at the door and at the rail, the sprinkling of lawyers and reporters, all stared at her. The miserable women of the streets who formed the chief part of the prisoners stared at her hardly. And one man, seeing her in the midst of such surroundings, grew white with

anger and muttered between his close-shut lips something that sounded like: "Good God! What is she doing here?"

It was Fitzhugh, of course, and as he hurried toward the little party, Hilda became conscious of herself for the first time. She became conscious, too, of the evidence which a man was giving against a woman at the bar; she heard the term "badger game," and her face prickled with a stinging blush. Why should this tiresome critic find her here?

"Good evening," he said brusquely. "Is there something I can do for you here?"

Hilda would have denied him, but the lamenting mother had no such proud scruples, and in a minute Miss St. George, with such dignity as she could muster, found herself explaining the situation.

"Have you a lawyer? Do you want one? Yes? Any particular one? No? Here—there's a friend of mine over there—Jacobs. He'll take charge for you—I can't very well, being from the prosecutor's office. Merely a matter of form, anyway, I suppose, to make things as easy as possible for the boy; offense admitted, isn't it? Miss St. George, this is Mr. Jacobs, who will see your protégé through the legal formalities."

He acted with such quickness and decision that Hilda gave him a grudging admiration, feeling, at the same time, a perfectly unwarrantable and unreasonable annoyance with Brewster for not being able to behave with equal force and effectiveness; which was manifestly absurd, for Brewster was an earnest philanthropist, and no lawyer.

When all the preliminaries had been attended to and Hilda understood that Willie was allowed to go home with his mother for the night, and that some one had given bail for his appearance the next day, she was a little dazed by the swiftness of it all. So that she accepted it as natural, in that hour of bewilderment, to be walking toward the settlement under the escort of her enemy, while Brewster went disconsolately away with the Plasters.

"If I could only make you understand," he cried fiercely, "how it makes me feel to see you—a woman like you—in such surroundings! What are your people thinking about? If you haven't the ability to recognize the right and fitting thing yourself, haven't they? You—in that courtroom! You, stared at by those men—in contact with those women!"

She had recovered herself a little now.

"And what of that poor, ignorant, bewildered mother in that court?" she asked. "Had she no necessity for being there? Had she no need of me there? At least I can speak the language, I can make myself clear!"

"I can't talk with you about it! I admit that her case is pitiful and might be worse but for you. But—it oughtn't to be you—you, young, lovely, to be guarded from harsh knowledge!"

They had reached the settlement. She laughed softly.

"No wonder your cousin Rita calls you an antediluvian," she said. "Oh, my good sir knight, wake up—wake up! We're several centuries out of mediaevalism."

But she gave him her hand in friendlier fashion than she had ever done before. And when she reached her room she lit the candles before her mirror and stared long at her reflection. "Young, lovely, to be guarded from harsh knowledge" was the refrain which sounded in her ears, and when she had lain down to sleep those were the words that banished the echo of Mrs. Plaster's wails and the sound of Willie's whimpering lies.

By the next morning she had, however, slept them off, as she put it. She was ready to go now to the precinct captain with definite knowledge in her possession. The captain heard her through gravely. He had had his own men detailed to watch the place, he said, but the proprietor was so very wary that he had not succeeded in obtaining one scintilla of evidence.

"Evidence that would hold, you understand, Miss St. George," he kindly explained. "Suspicious circumstances

—yes, there were those. But what's a suspicious circumstance when you go into court with it? It's evidence that you need—evidence."

There was a certain gleam in Hilda's eyes that the captain found it hard to meet as he uttered this excuse for non-interference with Willett's business. Then he met her glance with a sudden appearance of frankness.

"Miss St. George," he said, "how do your people stand in with Mr. Maguire, of the Old Farm? Good terms? Friendly? Well—if I was in your place and wanted Willett's shut up the easiest way—no trouble, no proceedin's, no bad blood made—I'd see Mr. Maguire!"

"Mr. Maguire?" Hilda looked puzzled.

"Barney Maguire—no others. He owns Number Twenty-seven, and him and Willett are good friends—I won't say they're partners, though some say that." The captain was enjoying himself; he had an old grudge against Bernard Maguire which he was not by any means strong enough to pay off, himself. But he liked to send a little casual unpleasantness in the saloon-keeper's direction. "Now, Mr. Maguire feels strong about the block—he's got its real welfare at heart, though he's only a self-made man and can't be expected to know its real welfare the same as you young ladies." There was no satire apparent upon the captain's round face, though Hilda looked at him sharply. "Why not go to Barney himself and have a plain talk with him? Tell him what the place is doin' to your boys."

"You feel yourself quite powerless in the matter, then?" said Hilda.

"Oh, I'm goin' to keep my men right on the job, and if I do get any evidence you can bet I'll use it. But real evidence's hard to come by. You see Mr. Maguire."

"If it is necessary, I will see the commissioner himself," declared Hilda stoutly.

"Oh, I hope it won't come to that," answered the captain suavely.

Behind his thick brown mustache he smiled. The commissioner was a party

man of the most pronounced loyalty, and Maguire was one of his ablest allies. It was because of the alliance between those two that the captain could not satisfy his own private grudge against Barney. He didn't want to be transferred to remotest Staten Island or farthest Bronx as a reward for his activity in ending the illegal activities of the commissioner's friend.

Hilda prided herself upon always striking while the iron was hot. She walked straight from the station house to the Old Farm saloon, and ringing the bell at the side door, demanded of the shirt-sleeved, soiled-aproned barkeeper who appeared, if Mr. Maguire was at home. Mr. Maguire was. Would the barkeeper be good enough to ask Mr. Maguire to see Miss St. George? The barkeeper would, and ushered her into the empty back room to await the proprietor's coming.

It was a dark and dingy hole, sufficient, Hilda thought, to cure any one of a taste for alcohol or vice. The stale odors of beer, whisky, smoke, and cheese were heavy on the air. The windows were darkened by colored papers pasted on to imitate stained glass. The little round tables, screwed into the floor by the iron foot of a single iron leg, were stained and discolored. At eleven o'clock in the morning, Mr. Maguire's back room left everything to be desired in the way of allurements.

Mr. Maguire entered and greeted Hilda with the courtly air of one power welcoming another. He asked her whether she would prefer to talk with him here, or in the flat upstairs, where Mrs. Maguire would be delighted to see her. Hilda murmured that some other day she would be glad to come in and call on Mrs. Maguire, but that to-day all her business was with him. Then, she paused, and he looked at her attentively.

He was a large man, flabby rather than burly, with a powerful head, lit by attentive, cold eyes. An uneven, close-cropped, graying mustache did not entirely hide the grim line of his lips. In his minute of intense scrutiny of

her, whatever his face ordinarily wore of heartiness and good-fellowship was obliterated.

"Mr. Maguire," she began ineptly, as she realized with annoyance, "you have the welfare of this neighborhood at heart?"

Still watching her narrowly, he smiled.

"I've lived here, boy and man, forty years come next November," he replied. "It was to Leroy Street we came when we landed. It would be the queer thing if any one cared more about this neighborhood than me—even the young ladies from Boston and God-knows-where who come here to live for a few months, or a few years, maybe."

Hilda felt the slap in the face, but she had learned diplomacy. She laughed.

"You have me there, Mr. Maguire," she answered. "But I am sure you will acknowledge that the settlement does stand for a true interest in the neighborhood."

"You'll never hear me deny that you mean well, all of you. And you'll remember, if you take time to think, Miss St. George, that I've always said the same—even when the Jews all thought you were going to try to make Christians of their children, and the Italians and Irish were afraid you'd try to turn Catholics into Baptist, and Father Scully himself was of a mind to forbid your clubs to his young people of St. Charles Boromeo."

Mr. Maguire spoke truly of certain definite services he had rendered the settlement in the days of its incipency.

"That is all true, and we have much to thank you for," said Hilda cordially. "It is remembering those things that emboldens me to speak to you, at the risk of seeming meddlesome in your affairs. You own Number Twenty-seven?"

Over Mr. Maguire's face ran a flash that said, as plainly as words: "O-ho! So that's it!" Aloud he replied:

"If you can call it ownin' when there's a bloody mortgage on it that eats me out of house and home with interest."

"Mr. Maguire, do you know that your new tenant there—Willets, I believe is his name—is running a policy den, and that the boys of this region are simply mad in the new gambling fever that's struck them?"

Mr. Maguire, through half-closed eyes, surveyed Miss St. George. He smiled and shook his head slowly.

"That's the one trouble with you ladies," he grieved softly. "You fly off the handle so. You don't investigate. Now, I wonder who's been telling you this fairy story?"

Hilda briefly related the grounds of her belief.

"Pure imagination, my dear young lady, pure imagination. Willett lets out the second floor to a social club that may play an occasional social game of cards there—same as some of your own boys' clubs may play a game of casino now and then. And the first floor is a plain pool parlor, plain for any one to see. He's got a license for that, and I'll take my oath that's all the game he's connected with. You haven't put the ban on a clean, cheap game of pool, with no betting, have you, Miss St. George?"

"Mr. Maguire," said Hilda impatiently, "what is the use of trifling with me?"

"My dear young lady, you was never more mistaken in your life than when you think I'm trifling with you. I couldn't. I wouldn't. But these mothers and sweethearts and these young rascallions of thieves all trifle with you—they won't put the blame for wrongdoing where it belongs. No—it's always got to be some one else that tempts Johnnie and Eddie; and the women don't know Willett, and he's a newcomer to this neighborhood, and it's easy to pick on him. I dare say they are throwing away their money somewhere, the boys—but it ain't in this district. This district is clean—thanks partly to you and partly, if I do say it myself, to me! You know I run a clean place, Miss St. George." He swelled with an honest pride. "No women let in at all; no dope ever handed out. Those were my rules from

the beginning. Clean, wholesome drinks for men—I made that my rule from the start. Serve no women and no children on the premises—of course, if a lady or a kid comes to the side door with a pitcher or a pail to fill for papa's supper, or for a friendly glass when the neighbors drop in, that's another thing. But——"

"It isn't your saloon, Mr. Maguire, that I am complaining about," Hilda reminded him.

"Well, I'm only asking you to mind that I stand for cleanness in this neighborhood, where I was brought up, and where I've brought up my own family. And I'm showing you that I wouldn't stand for no crooked business on Willett's side; though, of course, the place is his till his lease runs out."

"Then you won't do anything about it?" said Hilda, rising and abandoning the pretense of belief in his words.

He rose, too, and a grin distorted his heavy face.

"It's too bad you won't take my word for it that there's nothing to interfere with," he observed. "It would make you more contented in your mind. However, I'm used to being misjudged. As for gambling and drinking and vice in general, though I don't stand for none of it around where I have influence to stop it—it don't pay—why, Miss St. George, it's in the blood of the average man—I might say the normal man—to want 'em and to get 'em. You can't do nothing with your bottles of rose water, you and the other nice young ladies."

He brought out the last words with an insulting drawl. Hilda felt hot and furious. She lost the self-control she had maintained through the interview.

"At any rate, Mr. Maguire," she said, "we're going to try what we can do this fall. I shall make it the object of my life to make you regret your insolent abuse of your position."

Mr. Maguire laughed softly.

"Politics?" he said gently. "Well, I know the goo-goos do like the ladies' help in getting themselves defeated! Good day, Miss St. George."

CHAPTER V.

It was not primarily the desire to see Hilda St. George again that brought Fitzhugh to Manchester-by-the-Sea late in July. He had taken himself firmly in hand after the episode of the night court and had told himself that he was no college boy, to go philandering after a woman in whom he could cherish no real interest, and from whom he could not even derive the pleasure which the average pretty girl bestowed upon him. Some day, when he had made his way in the world, he was going to marry, of course—a pretty woman, also, of course; he liked pretty women; gentle, agreeable, intelligent enough to understand him, but not so infernally active-minded that she would want a career of her own; one who would neither know nor desire to know the seamy side of life; a woman with enough coquetry in her make-up to give him all the victor's delight in the winning of her, yet with entire whole-hearted loyalty to her home and her husband, once she had them. A restful woman—not a rampant fighter, not a logical talker, not a meddlesome, strong-minded woman, in short!

Accordingly he kept away from the Benson Memorial House during the week or two while Hilda was still in town. Later in the month, spending Sunday with his cousin at Southampton, she had mentioned the receipt of a letter from Hilda at Manchester, and he felt a momentary pang of annoyance because Miss St. George had not been in the city to mark his avoidance of her.

"She's organizing some committees for work this fall in the tenements," said Rita, half sighing. "Political work. She wants to get audiences of the tenement women together and to have a series of women speakers who will tell just what each party means to the homes of the poor—which stand for good tenement laws, which for bad, which——"

"Surely, Rita, you yourself——" began her husband anxiously.

"Oh, no!" Rita replied to the ques-

tion before it was asked. "She says she realizes that I couldn't with grace take part in any movement which may cost my cousin his position. She only wanted the address of Mrs. Stickley from me, and just mentioned why."

"Don't mind me, Rita," laughed her cousin. "If your tongue aches for public speech, exercise it, pray. Somehow, I don't feel Babcock's office much imperiled by your energetic young friend's campaign."

"You know perfectly well, Randy," answered his cousin, with a pout, "that I am not going to busy myself helping the Republicans into office—or their allies, the Independents. I can't forget that it is to those same Republicans you and I owe the poverty in which we were raised, and that my father and mother had to skimp and save after a lifetime of lavishness. If Irving hadn't rescued me from the fate, I dare say I'd be taking summer boarders on the homestead now. No, Tammany is good enough for me!"

"Where did you say Miss St. George was?" her cousin asked, when he had smiled approval upon her politics.

"She's with her family, at Manchester-by-the-Sea. They have a place there."

"That so? Babcock's stopping at the inn there for a week or two."

And it was to consult Babcock that he himself journeyed down to the Massachusetts coast at the end of the next week. On the train he told himself that he hardly expected to see her, and certainly had no desire to do so. Nevertheless she was the first person whom he saw when he alighted from the train. The space behind the handsome summer station was crowded with flashing equipages—automobiles, carts, buckboards. She sat upon the high seat of a cart, controlling with practiced wrist the movements of a spirited horse. The afternoon sunlight struck lights of gold from her shining dark hair, sparkled in the depths of her dark eyes, brought out the ruddy undertone of her ivory skin. Her horse had a proudly arched neck, a sleek coat, and bright caparisons. Fitzhugh had a real ad-

miration for a good horsewoman managing a spirited horse. His eyes beamed with pleasure as he looked upon his enemy. She seemed surprised, but gave him a friendly nod as he approached her.

"This is better than Ellena Street," he said, sniffing the salty air. "How well and rested you're looking!"

"Yes—I recuperate easily," she answered, watching absently over his head. "Oh! There you are! Mr. Fitzhugh, will you go after that light-haired young man who is blindly trudging in the wrong direction, and tell him that I am here? Perhaps you know him—Doctor Ransom?"

"No, I don't," replied the assistant district attorney, with a strong desire to growl the words as he started on his errand. He overtook Doctor Ransom at the other end of the platform.

"Doctor Ransom? Miss St. George has asked me to pilot you to her. You just missed her down at the other end of the platform."

Doctor Ransom was a good-looking, blond boy, long, lean, and laughing. His good looks and his youth were offenses to Fitzhugh, who asked himself gloomily if any one was so utterly reckless of life as to trust his ailments to that young whippersnapper.

"Thank you so much!" cried Hilda gayly when he had brought her straying guest to her and she had introduced them. "How long are you to be here, Mr. Fitzhugh? And where are you staying? We should be so glad to have——"

"You are very kind," Fitzhugh interrupted her coldly, "but I have run up on business merely, to consult Mr. Babcock. I shall be leaving again on Monday at the latest."

"Oh!" the girl exclaimed. "Mr. and Mrs. Babcock are dining with my aunt, Mrs. Dewey, to-night. I—— Perhaps we shall all meet there. I want my father and mother to meet you—they have heard me talk so often of your cousin."

She bowed and tightened the reins, chirruping to her horse. In a second Fitzhugh was standing alone, watch-

ing the cart disappear among the other vehicles, and summoning a lumbering station hack to carry him to the inn. She had had a very charming air—hospitable, warm, sweet, the right air for a woman to have in her own place to which she welcomes strangers, he told himself. If she were only always like that! And how could she endure that young puppy of a physician? Where had she said he was stationed—at which hospital? He was a mere boy, anyway, certainly not over twenty-five; he must be only just out of the medical school, if he was a hospital interne. Now, what in the name of all that was serious and purposeful could an able woman like Hilda St. George see in a mere boy like that?

When the preliminary talk with Babcock was interrupted by a telephone message from Mrs. Dewey asking that the Babcocks bring their guest, her niece's friend, to dinner also, he found it in his heart to forgive Doctor Ransom his youth and his intimacy with the St. Georges.

But though Mrs. Dewey had given him a place next Hilda, the dinner, in the beautiful dining room of the charming country house, was not unalloyed pleasure to him. In the first place, Doctor Ransom sat at Hilda's other side, and he was a youth gifted with a rapid flow of words and very high spirits—despicable qualities, Fitzhugh thought. Then it was soon apparent that he was one of the Ransoms—and that meant that he had not only good lineage, but plenty of money. And if he had obtained the appointment to the Ward Hospital, that fact proved that he had brains as well, confound him! And in the intervals of the lighter talk, the gay bantering, the intimate badinage, Randolph heard enough to convince him that the young man was interested in all those things which he designated as Hilda's "fads," at the irritated moment.

When they went back to the inn, he and Babcock sat up half the night planning the movements in the prosecution of an intricate conspiracy case. Fitzhugh was glad of the work—it took

his mind off this new and captivating Hilda.

"I suppose," said Babcock finally, when they pushed aside their papers and discussed a long, cold "nightcap" together, "that no officeholder ever laid down his job yet without feeling that he ought to have it for another term just to bring to completion all the mighty reforms he has begun. I know I feel that way very strongly—I don't want to get out the first of the year, and that's not on account of the salary, or even the chances for graft which our reform friends declare to be so valuable to us—thank God, they can go through my books without causing me a qualm!—but solely because I'd like to get this trial-calendar business amended. I've made a good start—"

When he paused with a sigh, Randolph looked at him a trifle anxiously.

"You don't take all this talk of downing us seriously?" he said.

"We're going to have a hard fight for our lives, my boy," replied the older man. "In the first place, the town's about due for a change. In the second place, there are abuses—those fools of grafters who can never see a rod's length beyond their noses have given the goo-goos plenty of ammunition to be used against us. You know that as well as I do. I don't claim that the organization is all right; only that the other organization is rottener, and that the mugwumps are absurdly inadequate, and that they play into the other organization's hands. But they've got us on the run this time, Randy, my boy. We've got to fight for our lives. For the first time that I have ever heard tell of, they've got a fine organization themselves. There'll be no walk-over for us."

Fitzhugh stared through the open window into the impenetrable night beyond the bright room. Babcock glanced at him with sudden question.

"It doesn't need to worry you—financially, I mean. You could probably do better outside the office than inside, even now."

"I'm afraid not yet," said Randy. "It's not an easy game to break into,

the law in New York. However, that wasn't what was worrying me. It's merely—a little bet I had laid upon the election," he finished, with a laugh.

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Maguire, captain of his block, was in consultation with his boss, the leader of the district. They were in the basement dining room of the latter's fine old house, one of an old-fashioned row now given up mainly to the base uses of the "furnished roomer." Schatz's wife and daughters would have been glad to move out of the neighborhood altogether, into something new and shiny on the upper West Side, and they frequently pointed out to Schatz that he could afford the change. They didn't bother to understand when he replied that to move was the very last thing on earth he could afford. He had barely weathered the disapproval in the neighborhood when, ten years before, he had exchanged the two floors over the shop, whose legend "builder and contractor" denoted his ostensible means of livelihood. He understood the temper of his constituency. They wanted one of themselves for their leader, their representative. And it was in not understanding this fact that the opposition had hitherto made its most grievous mistake.

"As long as they put up some dude whose father had a house, shut up half the year at that, on the upper side of the square, we was sure of a walk-over," he complained to Maguire. "But, damn 'em, this year it's Lewando the painter, who lives in a three-room flat, an' that every man, woman, an' child knows, that they're tryin' to run in on us for alderman. An' Boles the plumber for the assembly. An' Dan Guinness, who does the biggest business in pension papers of any notary in the district, for senator. An' even where they have put up a silk-stockinged fellow, it's one that has lived right around here for years an' that everybody knows, like Justice Greene, who's given more drunks another

chance, an' sent more quarrelin' wives an' husbands out of the room for a chance to talk it over, than any other man that ever sat in Jefferson Market. No, sir, they're on the right tack as far as this district is concerned this year, an' it's up to us to hump ourselves. Now let's see the papers."

Maguire produced them from his pocket and laid them upon the red tablecloth. They were documents accounting for each resident of the block of which Ellena Street formed one side. Schatz ran his eyes down the lists, frowning as he did so.

"Look-a-here, Maguire," he said after his swift survey, "this ain't a very good showin'. It ain't what it was two years ago, by a long shot. Here's Thirty-four and Thirty-six Van Cott Street—they turned out a solid vote last election; what the devil do you mean by givin' twenty-six out of forty to the other side?"

"One of them amatoor Carnegies, that's afraid of dyin' rich, bought up the property about two years ago an' ran up a pair of model tenements with a courtyard between. He was a friend of those busy-face dames at the settlement, an' they filled up the place with their protégés as soon as the houses were finished. Some of those sissy young gentlemen who do good an' live cheap, an' run off Miss St. George's clubs for her, lodge there, too."

Schatz nodded and passed the inevitable over quickly.

"You've marked the Dorgans doubtful. I thought the old man was a dyed-in-the-wool Republican ever since the War?"

"He was. Because he marched with Sherman from Georgy to the sea you couldn't budge him from the Republicans with an axe. But when Johnny—that's the boy, just turned twenty-one last summer—hurtled himself falling through the skeleton of the St. Bololph Hotel, eighteen or nineteen stories—twas a miracle how he lived!—I fixed it up with Delaney, the sub-contractor, to carry him along on the rolls all the time he was in the hospital. An'

I see more or less of Mrs. Dorgan. When she took to tellin' the old man that it was a long time ago that Sherman marched through Georgy an' only last month that Mr. Maguire was keepin' the bread in their mouths, I thought we stood a chance."

Schatz nodded as he ran on down the list. When he had finished he raised his eyes to Maguire's face.

"It's a mighty uncertain proposition, that block, Barney. And we can't afford no uncertainties this trip. I've got to deliver the goods from this district. You've got to deliver me the goods from that block. Else—if I don't turn in the votes to headquarters—it's good-by, Adolph. An', by Himmel, if you don't turn in the votes to me, it'll be good-by, Barney, for you!"

"I'll attend to the block all right," Maguire promised, with a little surliness, as he returned the slip to his pocket. "I'll take mine neat," he added as Schatz went to the sideboard, an ornate structure of yellow oak, and held a decanter out inquiringly.

"By the way," remarked the district leader, "how is Willett's getting on? Has little flare against him died down? The one that the papers made a good deal of in the silly season—when some lunatic mother an' some young scamp of a boy shot off their mouths?"

"He's doin' all right," replied Maguire, swallowing his whisky. "Eveson's got no kick coming on the returns from Willett's place." Eveson being the gentleman who enjoyed at the time the title of the "policy king." "As for the blubberin' mothers, I got Willett to make a few friendly contributions to outings an' funerals an' one thing an' another. He's pretty solid with them all now."

"Well, there'd better not be any rumpus about the place between now an' election," advised Schatz.

"There ain't goin' to be," replied Mr. Maguire, with fatuous assurance, as he took his leave.

Even as he walked away from his chieftain's dwelling, Hilda St. George's railroad cab was lumbering into Ellena Street, with Hilda's face, gloriously

browned by much sun and wind, looking joyfully out through the window. She sniffed at the close air without disgust; her bright, glad eyes looked forth upon squalor without shrinking. The enforced idleness of the summer had irked her; never before had she felt so certain that her place, her work, were here, in dingy, crowded, sinful Ellena Street, as since another had questioned that fact. And she was determined to prove it to that other now!

As the cab rattled along over the cobbles—Hilda making a mental note of the fact that she meant to "agitate" for an asphalt roadway that very season—there was a sudden shriek, two pistol shots rang out, and down the flight of steps before Number Twenty-seven a man staggered backward, his smoking pistol still pointed toward the doorway. On the threshold, even as Hilda's horror-stricken eyes stared upon the scene, a man's figure slowly crumpled, and sank. As he fell, a revolver rolled from his limp fingers.

Immediately, with the swiftness with which a crowd always gathers, the street was full, the doorway was blocked, and there was a great hubbub. The policeman, loitering near the corner, came running. And to him Neil Blake, ashen, disheveled, with set lips and staring eyes, handed over the revolver he held in his hand.

"'Twas me did it," he said woodenly. "You don't have to do any lookin'." "Twas me done it."

The policeman, holding Neil in a rough grasp, broke a path, with oburgations and elbows and stick, through the tightly packed, vociferous mob that swarmed over the steps. He felt of the sodden heap on the threshold—the heap that had been Willett.

"Telephone St. Vincent's," he shouted. "Hi, there—you, Jim, telephone St. Vincent's."

Some screaming woman who had run off Ellena Street and into the great, dreary artery of travel at one end of it, came screaming back now with another policeman. The two officers of the law shoved and swore the crowd out of the way. Hilda came toward

them with trembling knees, and face from which all the homecomer's gladness had been frozen. Her neighbors made way for her almost as though her smart traveling frock had been the uniform of some sisterhood.

"Neil, Neil—officer——" she faltered.

Neil turned his desperate, sullen eyes toward her. For the first time a change crept over his face. It melted and broke.

"Oh, Miss St. George!" he cried. "You tell Maggie—you tell Maggie—don't let her hear no other way. She's at Jungmann's—white goods——"

"I know, I know, Neil," she told him. "I'll see her. I'll tell her—but what?"

With clangings of its warning bell, the St. Vincent's ambulance turned into the street. After it came the station wagon, with a policeman driving and another sitting behind, to help their brethren. The white-coated young ambulance surgeon jumped from the first vehicle, ran up the steps, felt for Willett's heart.

"All over," he said curtly, and Neil's ashen face grew more ghastly. It was like a death mask of horror.

"I did it—in—self-defense!" The words whistled through his teeth as though he spoke in a driving storm and cold. "He was backin' me out with a pistol pointed at me, with his finger—my God, you all heard his shot first?" he cried in agony.

They hustled him into the waiting police wagon, while the surgeon directed the moving of Willett back into the house he had called his a little hour before. And up and down the street the story ran—escaping from the place of death no one knew exactly how; the story of how Neil Blake had been ruinin' himself in Willett's; of how he had heard, with sufficient authority to convince him of the truth of the statement, that the policy prizes were awarded—when, indeed, they were awarded at all—not as any numbers fell, but: Willett and Eveson and the policy ring decided, to some dummy of their own naming; how, furious and sick, he had entered Willett's and

sought to intimidate him, with a display of revolver and loud boy's talk about exposure, at which Willett laughed, into returning what he had wasted; and that, the neighbors whispered, was not only all that he and Maggie had together saved toward their marriage, but also some small sum mulcted from his employer; and how Willett, seizing a pistol himself, had forced the lad backward through the halls and to the very door, bidding his associates and hangers-on leave the matter to him; and how on the very doorsill the tragedy had culminated.

Hilda stopped at the settlement for no greetings from her comrades.

Bidding her driver dump her trunk and bags on the sidewalk, and signaling the settlement janitor, who was staring down the street toward the crowd at Twenty-seven, to take charge of them, she said sharply:

"Jungmann's—on Sixth Avenue."

Jungmann's was not a place at which Hilda had ever done any shopping. It was not on the "white list" of the Consumers' League, and it boasted no attractions to lure a loyal member of that organization from her promise to deal only with such shops as treat their employees fairly. It was distinctly the shopping place of the million. There was scarcely passageway in the aisles between the tumbled counters of amazing "bargains"; the air was fetid beneath the low, old-fashioned ceilings; poorly dressed women, most of them accompanied by small children, trailed along, shrill, avid, distrustful—as well they might be—of the flamboyant legends over every pile of goods. Behind the counters, tired-looking girls performed their duties with scant interest or civility. Hilda felt faint as she asked a magnificent lord of creation, a floorwalker—he reminded her of a strutting rooster in the chicken yard at Manchester—to direct her to the white-goods department.

She found Maggie engaged in trying to show "something a little nicer than those fifty-nine-cent nightgowns" to a woman who made it plain that she did not wish to pay more than sixty

cents for the superior garments. Large placards of cardboard swinging everywhere announced a "mammoth slaughter of white goods." Maggie, standing just beneath one such sign, looked frailer and more worried than she had been when Hilda went away. It smote the older girl's heart with anguish—that sad, delicate, anxious young face, that was like so many thousands of other young faces in the great, ravaging city.

"Maggie," she said, as the girl passed her in her search for the customer's desideratum in nightgowns.

Maggie started. At first a rosy light of gladness lit up her countenance—she was deeply attached to the head of the Benson Memorial House. Then the swift certainty of trouble clutched at her. Why else should Miss St. George be here, in this mob of half-washed, poor, avaricious women, frantically struggling to make every dime do a dollar's worth of work? With her arms full of coarse white muslin gowns, she stood like one transfixed.

"You must get away, my dear," said Hilda, "and come with me. There is—trouble—you are needed—"

"Is it Neil?" asked Maggie very quietly, while the shopper resentfully demanded to know if she was to be kept waiting all day.

For a second Hilda wavered before the truth. Then she looked at Maggie earnestly.

"It is—and he needs every bit of your courage to help him."

The heroic in the girl rose to meet the demand for it, the expectation of it.

"I'll come in just a minute," she said, with so much self-control that Hilda marveled. Self-control was not a quality in which Ellena Street was conspicuously strong.

In a few minutes she had made her arrangements—had told the head of her department that she must leave, had sent another clerk to the fuming seeker after nightgowns, had donned her cheap, fading summer hat and her cotton gloves, and was walking to the elevator with Hilda. She asked no questions, and made no moan until they

were seated in the cab, that suddenly impressed Hilda as breathlessly stuffy. Perversely, the thought of all the passengers who had ridden in it, on journeys of pleasuring and on journeys of sorrowing, came between her and the suffering girl with her. It was that tendency to see the individual grief, the individual hardship multiplied, that had turned Hilda St. George into paths of publicity and philanthropy.

"Please tell me, Miss St. George," the girl cried out in a strangled way, while Hilda witlessly thought of all the grief and anguish in the world.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," she cried, bringing home all her faculties again, and wrapping Maggie in tender arms, "he has shot Willett. He did it, he says, and I believe, in self-defense. Only"—she faltered, struck by the difficulty which she had had when first Neil made the claim—"only he had gone to Willett's and had—" She broke off.

"He went there—again? Oh, he promised me only last night that he would never take a chance again—"

"He did not go to take a chance, to play any game, to buy any policy slips," explained Hilda. "But it seems that he had at last heard, from some source he credited, what we could all have told him—what he must have heard a thousand times from sources he did not credit—that there is no chance for any outsider in those places; that no one outside the ring ever draws a lucky slip, unless it is for a blind. At last, he heard all this from some one he believed, poor boy, and he went to Willett and taxed him with it, and, so I heard them say, tried to force Willett to return some of the money he had been taking from Neil. And Willett tried to put him out—and was shot, just as he was shooting at Neil."

The girl shrank into the corner of the cab. She looked like a stricken old woman—drawn, pinched, despairing, as though she had crowded into her eighteen or nineteen years all the hopeless experiences of threescore. For a few minutes she did not speak. Then she said:



On the threshold a man's figure slowly crumpled, and sank.

"It will go hard with him. Maguire was Willett's friend—his silent partner, some say. An' that'll mean that it'll be hard to get a good lawyer—you see, usually, if one of the boys gets in trouble on the block, it'd be Maguire that'd help them out. But now——"

"Don't think of that again," answered Hilda, devoutly thankful that here was an opening which allowed her to say a hopeful word. "I shall see to that myself, if you and Neil will let me. I have lawyer friends."

At the police court they found that Neil had been remanded to the Tombs. They drove there, and Maggie went in to see her lover. When she came

back to the office where Hilda waited, there was a light almost of happiness on her patient face.

"He says, will you come to him for a minute, Miss St. George? I told him what you said about a lawyer. He wants to thank you. And, oh—Miss St. George—if he gets over this—he'll be so different—I know he will!" The eternal cry of hope on anguished women's lips sprang to hers.

In truth there was a new look of responsibility on Neil's face when Hilda saw him. The mood of despair, of shivering horror, was gone; the sight and sound of Maggie had brought strength to him.



"'Twas me did it," he said woodenly.

"Will you do what you can for her?" he asked Hilda, indicating Maggie. "For she's one of God's angels—and so are you, Miss St. George."

In due course of time, a wagon from the precinct station, in charge of no less a personage than the captain himself, drove up to Twenty-seven Ellena Street and removed a roulette wheel, a bale of policy slips, and Willett's books. There was no need of any raid or of any other evidence than the afternoon's events to establish the nature of the business done by the late tenant. Before long a more gruesome vehicle drew up in front of the place, and in a day or two a long funeral procession

filed out of Ellena Street, coach after coach. Then the door of Number Twenty-seven was locked and its windows were boarded, while Mr. Maguire, across the street, cursed the untimeliness of the whole affair, and more especially the pernicious activity of the press in describing the lamentable occurrences.

CHAPTER VII.

Randolph arrived half an hour too early at his cousin Rita's dinner, but he found the lady dressed and wandering through her rooms looking at her decorations.

"Whom are you having?" he asked

her, when he had made the polite remarks which the occasion demanded.

"Oh, a lot of people—your old flame, Edith Morrison, for one."

"So? I haven't seen Edith in three years—not since the last time I was in Richmond."

"And young Doctor Ransom, of Ward's Hospital."

"Where did you pick him up?" demanded Randolph, stressing his pronoun most discourteously.

"At his sister's—Mrs. Vanalstyne's. Why don't you like him? I think he's a dear—he's so full of spirits. And awfully brilliant, too."

"You don't need to run a kindergarten yet, Rita," her cousin told her impertinently. "You're still an attractive woman—grown men will still look at you."

Rita laughed, unmoved alike by the gibe and the tribute.

"Oh, he isn't on my staff—he's heels over head in love with your *bête noir*, Hilda St. George. And she's one of those who are coming."

At that moment the portières opened to admit the first of the guests, and the voice of the man was heard announcing Colonel Morrison and Miss Morrison. Fitzhugh greeted the fair Edith warmly, although he found himself at once, to his own surprise, picking flaws in the type that he had always extolled. Why did she want to pout at him? Why was her fair hair arranged with such an artful negligence that no one could fail to perceive the art? Why did she take him to task with that little coquettish air for his remissness in not coming to see her? Hang it all, why couldn't she be a straightforward, hearty, friendly human being like— Ah, like this one now advancing—Hilda, lovely in floating lavender, with shining, steadfast eyes that had no tricks, with grave, sweet mouth that had no grimaces, with slim, strong hands guiltless of meaning pressures and of meaning listlessness?

"I am glad to see you again," he found himself telling Hilda with a note of sincerity in his voice. "But you

aren't looking as fresh and fit as that night at the beach."

"I came back to some horrors," she answered, and it thrilled his heart to realize that she spoke as if she counted upon his sympathy.

"Yes," he answered understandingly. "That was an ugly affair—and it met you on your very threshold, I judge from the papers."

She nodded.

"They'll get him off, I think. Reynolds is a splendid fellow for helping people escape the results of their indiscretions. One of the best jury lawyers I have ever heard. And of course in this case—well, even a prosecutor must feel that there was something to be said on the boy's side."

"Will you go one step farther," she asked him, the ghost of a mocking smile on her face, "and say that even a prosecutor must repudiate the system which makes such a horror possible?"

"That would be to repudiate human nature, wouldn't it? And would it not seem a little conceited in a mere man to do that?"

"I refer to the political system."

"No—you only think that you refer to the political system," he told her, but with a friendly smile which robbed the words of their impertinence. "It's really faulty human nature as developed in a democracy, not democracy itself, which makes these sordid tragedies."

"It's your party," she told him, and in turn her smile robbed the speech of some of its rudeness, "which countenances an alliance between lawlessness and power—between crime and the authorities. And that's what is really responsible for poor Neil Blake's downfall."

"I don't know poor Neil Blake, but I am willing to take a strong oath that it was his own weakness, his own greed, his own desire to win something without working for it, which brought about this affair. Not that I wish to defend any alliance between the authorities and vice. But—do you mean to say that you think your triumph—I mean the victory of the other side—at the polls, would end such alliances?"

"Most cert——" she began, but Edith Morrison drifted toward them.

"Oh, Miss St. George!" she exclaimed. "Mrs. Chambers tells me that you're such a wonderful woman; that you live among the poor, and help them, and are interested in politics and are altogether marvelous! I want to ask you if I may not come and see your work in operation, though Randy will tell you that I'm a perfectly useless home woman myself."

Hilda had seemed to stiffen as though an icy film were encasing her during this speech. Usually she was able to smile through the banalities of a woman like Edith Morrison, and to make a fitting rejoinder; she had even come to the point in philanthropic diplomacy when she exacted from these silly flatterers and sensation seekers some tangible tribute for her work in return for her pains in being obliged to listen to them. But this woman, talking of "Randy," with that drawl of intimacy and affection, angered her.

"Really, I'm afraid that there would be nothing at the Benson Settlement to interest you," she replied, turning away.

"Why, Randy," cried Miss Morrison in affected surprise, "your pretty lady doesn't like poor little me! What did I say to offend her?"

"Don't ask me to tell you what poisoned barbs you shot, Edie," laughed Randolph. "Who am I that I should try to interpret between women?"

"Do you—do you—like her very much, Randy?" cooed Edith, dropping her full, long-lashed lids over her blue eyes and half whispering. She waited to hear the low-toned: "Not nearly so much as I do some one else whom you may know, Edith," but what she did hear was a crisp: "Very much indeed, Edith." She raised her eyes in astonishment.

"You don't play the game any more, then?" she asked him, with a dimple showing at the corner of her lips. Edith was not without a sense of humor.

Randolph smiled amusedly upon her as he shook his head.

"I'm afraid I've lost the trick," he answered. "You see—I'm growing up."

"Ah!" Edith colored. She was not a year younger than Randolph, and she knew that he knew it. "But it isn't age that does it, Randy—makes the game a bore. It's finding—the real thing, I think." She made a little moue. "Charming evenings around the hearth you could have with—a really superior woman! Saloon statistics—the negro-in-the-South question easily settled, shall-women-vote, and shall-children-work—— Oh, charming evenings at home!"

"My dear Edith," said Randolph calmly, "why have you posed as a pretty simpleton all these years? You really have quite a gift of satire."

But all the reward he had for snubbing his old sweetheart and for his high-minded declaration that his flirting days were over, was to listen to Hilda St. George and Fred Ransom, across the table, talk of "relief for discharged patients," as if their souls were in the topic, and to watch Edith's very lovely shoulder turned pointedly toward him as she devoted herself to her neighbor on her other side. The lady on his left, being sixty and very much interested in her food, afforded him no relief from the position in which his lofty assumption of virtue had put him. He tried to follow her example and to eat with a whole-hearted interest in Rita's viands. But he could not command the appetite, and he glowered at Doctor Ransom, and picked flaws in his personal appearance until Rita marshaled her women into the drawing-room.

The men, to Ransom's very evident discomfort, lingered long over their cigars and liqueurs. That young man was so obviously eager to join the ladies—the ladies! Fitzhugh decided that the youth's devotion to Hilda was disgracefully conspicuous!—as to be rather a nuisance to his confrères. When at last he could make his escape to the drawing-room, he was immediately at Miss St. George's side. Fitzhugh advanced upon them savagely.

"I must be off," he told them. "Don't get up, Ransom. I'm only here to tell Miss St. George that I expect to be speaking in her bailiwick a good deal for the next few weeks. Bespeak me the tolerance of your side, please, Miss St. George—I don't want to be howled down or stoned down."

"You don't need protection in our neighborhood," said Hilda, smiling. "I'm sorry to say that Mr. Maguire's party seems stronger to me—so far—than our own; besides, those tactics you speak of are not ours, but his—yours."

"You fight with only sweetness and light as weapons, then? So much the better for me. Good night. Good night, Ransom."

"Funny," observed the young physician, "but I thought Fitzhugh told me that he wasn't going to take an active part in the campaign."

"Not take part in the campaign?" Hilda almost sneered. "Why, he's an officeholder!"

Then she was angry with herself for the imputation she had cast upon Fitzhugh's motives; and being angry with herself, very femininely made it unpleasant for Ransom for the next five minutes. Edith Morrison herself could scarcely have behaved in a more thoroughly unadvanced fashion.

CHAPTER VIII.

As the head of the Benson Memorial Settlement made her way, in an autumn drizzle, toward the street cars at the corner, she noticed signs of life already stirring again at Number Twenty-seven. The front door was open, some of the windows were run up, a furniture van loaded almost entirely with cot beds stood before the steps. Mr. Maguire was evidently thriftily planning to turn his property to account again. From the house, Hilda's eyes naturally turned toward the Old Farm saloon. At the boxlike entrance, its proprietor stood, large, well-dressed, smoking a cigar, and watching the van across the street. Hatred of him and of all he represented surged high in the

girl as she saw him—no less sleek and prosperous, no less self-satisfied, no less predatory, than he had been before he had helped to send Neil Blake to madden himself in the Tombs awaiting his trial, before he had sent the light of youth out of Maggie's face, and had stilled life altogether on the face of his own friend and companion. She averted her eyes swiftly before his gaze, meeting hers, should force her to bow to him, or else to give the final advertisement to her feelings by refusing to bow to him.

She was on her way to the Sunbeam Settlement in Jersey City where, as a light from the philanthropic metropolis, she was to address a meeting upon the subject of coöperation with the hospitals. She was not vitally interested in the subject just at present—the campaign was a more absorbing matter; but the engagement was one of long standing and she was keeping it from a stern sense of duty. The sight of Mr. Maguire and his reredented house made her hate the wasting of time in Jersey City. Until after election she would like not to go off the block, not to speak even privately upon any subject other than the iniquities of the present administration, not to sleep, eat, or breathe anything but the downfall of her antagonists.

Three or four hours later, when she came out of the meeting at the Jersey City settlement, the gray afternoon was grayer, the drizzle more penetrating. She splashed stolidly toward her street car and thought to herself how much more depressing was the squalor of smaller towns than that of New York. She marked the low-lying saloons, the mean dwellings, among which she passed. An acrid smoke seemed poised in the wet air; the roar of innumerable locomotives seemed heavy upon it. A hideous day—a hideous place—she told herself.

And just then the door of the saloon she was passing swung open and Mr. Maguire stepped out into the chill drizzle, buttoning his raincoat up to his chin. He was attended by his brother saloonkeeper and one tall, poorly

dressed, swaggering young man who coughed when the outside air blew upon him.

"To-morrow mornin' then—no later—twenty of you——" Hilda caught the words from her neighbor's deep chest as she came almost up with them.

"We'll be there," coughed the young man.

"Larrigan's one that never goes back on his word," said the proprietor of the place commendingly.

Hilda lowered her umbrella to make a screen between herself and the men as she passed.

"By gad, he'd better not go back on his word to me," grunted Maguire. "Well—good day to ye. It's all settled."

He was advancing behind Hilda. Some suspicion was working strongly in her—she could not interpret it. She crossed the street, to avoid his overtaking her, and walked slowly, pondering. Suddenly she turned and retraced her steps toward the Sunbeam House.

"I'm a fanciful fool," she told herself. "But I can't help it—I have never had such a—premonition—conviction—such a 'leading' as this, in all my life!"

The residents of the Sunbeam House were astonished but courteously delighted to see her again. Had she left something? Oh—she wanted to know if they knew one Larrigan, a saloon hanger-on of the neighborhood? All of them knew him, indeed! They were trying even now what could be done for Larrigan's consumptive sister; he was a tough proposition himself, but the girl was sweet and docile, and the one good streak in Larrigan was his fondness for her. Could she—Hilda—be taken to see Rose Larrigan? Well—why—oh, well, yes, of course! Wonderingly they piloted her to the tenement which one of their nurses made so clean and orderly each morning; they seated her by the girl's airy couch and commended her to the invalid. Then they left her.

An hour later Larrigan himself came coughing up the stairway. Hilda always had a weak corner in her heart for him after she heard his voice greet-

ing his sister from the other side of the room. When he entered the room, he paused awkwardly and stared at the stranger.

An hour later Hilda went away from the tenement. Her cheeks were hot, her eyes hard and bright. Larrigan was kneeling by his sister's couch fondling her wasted hand shyly.

"It'll set you up—it'll cure you, Rosy," he kept saying over and over again. "I couldn't have done it for anything else—sold out Maguire."

"But, oh, Harry, it was right anyway," whispered Rose.

"No," answered the boy, groping toward some primitive ethics, "a man ought to stay bought; even if he's bought for something that ain't what it ought to be. But—never mind—you'll be among those pine trees this time Wednesday."

That night Hilda locked in her little strong box a long document. The next morning she transferred it to her safety-deposit box in the bank. And the end of the forenoon found a score of new residents at Number Twenty-seven.

"They're min thet'll worruk on the bridge Schatz got the contract fer," explained Mrs. Hennesey. "Sure, they've been livin' around here for six month or a year now, but Schatz wants thim all together—or somethin'. An' he's payin' Maguire a foine rint fer th' place."

All of which the neighborhood heard with indifference, being much concerned with the problems of its own roofing, dining, and clothing. Mr. Schatz certainly took some interest in the matter, for he asked his trusted lieutenant if he had "their residences for the last six months," and nodded approvingly when Maguire said emphatically: "Every damn one of them. An' twenty landlords to swear to it."

Sometimes, when Larrigan lounged along the street, he saw Hilda. His thin cheek would flush a little uneasily at these encounters, and he would consciously avert his eyes. But Hilda always sailed by with the open brow and

frank, forward glance of utter righteousness.

CHAPTER IX.

First among the good citizens of the district to register for the privilege of voting upon election day were the inmates of Number Twenty-seven. They were able to give excellent account of themselves—they had lived at Number Twenty-seven, Ellena Street, for the requisite number of days before registration; they had lived in the district the requisite number of weeks before that. If any one had been rude enough to doubt their bland record of themselves, they were supported in their assertions not only by those two gentlemen of weight and substance in the community, Messrs. Schatz and Maguire, but also by twosome "landlords" of the past year. Brewster, one of the self-appointed watchers at the registration booths, came into the settlement dinner that evening discouraged.

"Those thugs that Schatz and Maguire have imported from God knows where," he said, "have gotten through with scarcely a question. I did as much challenging and general interfering as I could, but every leak there might have been in the story has been so neatly mended you'd never know it was there. The only thing that puzzles me is why they went to the trouble and expense of colonizing—Maguire and his boss. They might just as well have rung in the good, cheap, old repeaters on us; the district is theirs."

"Don't talk like that," cried Hilda. "Don't cry out that you're beaten before the fight is begun. Doesn't the very fact that those men considered it necessary to colonize, and to have their stories and their papers dovetail so exactly, show that they know they don't own the district? They think there's going to be a fight—so, for pity's sake, don't let us give them a walk-over!"

"Some one was telling me to-day," said Katherine Vaughan, with an air of importance, "that this was likely to be one of the closest districts this year."

"They're certainly making a fight for

it," agreed Brewster gloomily. "Did you know that there was a Tammany cart-tail meeting going on outside of Carter's Hall last night, while the ex-mayor and the ex-governor were booming away inside? And that the cart-tail orators caught a lot of the people we thought we had nailed?"

"Who were their speakers?" asked Hilda, with a little air of scorn. The ex-mayor and the ex-governor had seemed to her very strong drawing cards—she wondered whom the opposition would put up to counteract their attraction.

"Why, a funny fellow named Meyers, and that Fitzhugh who's a cousin of Mrs. Chambers, spied each other," said Brewster. "Meyers could get a laugh every sentence, and Fitzhugh was witty enough, too."

Hilda paled a little. She was not the first woman to declare her intention to wage war and then to be outraged that the weapons of war were used against her. However, she achieved a laugh with some lightness in it.

"Oh, the clowns!" she said. "But, after all, jests are not arguments. No one who heard the figures that ex-Mayor Gradley read could doubt for an instant that there is tremendous graft. And the governor's speech was powerful."

"Yes, I dare say—but somehow Meyers and Fitzhugh made them seem merely funny and sort of goody-goody and stuffy."

A flag of red unfurled on Hilda's cheek. It was the signal of final battle. Her eyes flashed, her lips compressed themselves ominously.

"I'm sorry to think that that sort of thing carries weight," she said scornfully. "But even if it does—even if the people are silly and short-sighted—the fight isn't lost yet. And as for this barefaced attempt to colonize the district with men who have no more right to vote here than I have to make speeches in the House of Commons, surely that can be exposed and prevented."

"My dear Miss St. George," cried Brewster despairingly, "haven't I been

telling you that there isn't a single leak in the story of the men with whom Maguire has filled up his house? He vouches for them, Schatz vouches for them; forty men who claim to have known them for the last two or twenty years, as the case may be, vouch for them. It isn't merely that the place is filled up with enough men to change the vote on this block, as you and I and everybody else who is vitally interested know well enough; but that they're accounted for by a perfect system of perjury! We can challenge their votes—our watchers will, of course; but those votes will be counted, and don't you forget it!"

"Suppose we could bring evidence afterward proving that there had been fraud?"

"Bring evidence? To convince whom? You and me, who know the truth already? Maguire and Schatz, who know it as well as we do? The election board? Oh, we'd be landed in a long-drawn-out contest, and while it was being settled, the fraudulently seated officers would probably serve out their terms."

"You are a faint-hearted creature!" cried Hilda, half laughing, half in earnest, wholly alert, intent.

"I'm a little discouraged, that's true," admitted Brewster. "You see, I heard those men last night, I heard the laughter they excited, the applause, the approbation they got—they talk sense and patriotism, you know, quite as well as our side; they don't get up and proclaim themselves the allies of the devil, and ask for votes on that ground! I heard them. And today I saw those toughs and thugs, those beasts hired to beat the honest wishes of the city, out registering early, while our men were putting it off; it was a fine day, you see, and I dare say the hunting is good in Virginia, or the motoring in the Berkshires, or there are a thousand and one agreeable things to do elsewhere; they'll register on one of the later days—if there's nothing more diverting to do! And meantime some hired criminal is registering in their name, and there'll be the dickens of a

muddle to prove who's who when the time comes. Discouraged? Yes."

"Well, you needn't be," said Hilda valiantly.

She pushed back her dessert plate and looked down the long table. Half the young women and men at it had been listening to her discussion with Brewster, half of them were talking over the affairs of the neighborhood as their day's work had revealed it to them—the Kings' new baby and its chances of survival in the rear tenement, the dispossession of old Mrs. Lantry, the arrest of Fernlow on his wife's complaints of non-support and cruelty, and her withdrawal of the charges as soon as she was confronted with Fernlow in the courtroom. Outside, a campaign band went by, playing spiritedly "A Hot Time in the Old Town" and "Mr. Dooley" in alternation with "America" and "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Hilda was suddenly weary of it all—the strenuous work since her return had tired her more than a whole season usually did; she caught herself thinking, by some sudden contrast, of her aunt's dinner at Manchester, and the cool, crisp, salty air that stirred the curtains of the dining room that summer night when she had been so burningly and tremulously conscious of Randolph Fitzhugh's eyes upon her across the table. That memory, poignant and sweet, made this present moment, when he was not only opposing but actually ridiculing her aims, the more bitter.

"Come," she cried, rising, "let the coffee be brought to the library. I'll be there in a minute."

She hurried to a room known as the office, and closed the door, as she took the telephone receiver from its hook. She got her number. Then:

"Is this the Ward Hospital? Yes? I should like to speak to Doctor Ransom. Tell him Miss St. George, please."

There was a pause. Her heart was pounding hard against her side. Between her trembling lips she kept saying: "I will win, I will win—any way, any way! I will win!" Then sudden-

ly her eyes lit and she put her lips to the transmitter.

"Oh, Fred, is that you? This is I—Hilda. I want to see you just as soon as I possibly can. What? You can come this evening—you're off duty? Oh, hurrah, hurrah! I have such a mad, glorious plan for outwitting—well, hurry down, and I'll tell you."

He came within half an hour, and they were closeted together in Hilda's office. Sounds of explosive laughter issued thence from time to time. Some of the girls who were half jealous of their young "head's" beauty and prestige said to one another that Hilda St. George had certainly let the cares of the neighborhood and of the campaign slide easily from her shoulders that night. And when the merry conference was over, the pair issued, bright-eyed, laughing, intimate, from the office and went forth to listen to some of the open-air speaking in the neighborhood. Randolph Fitzhugh, firing witticisms at the opposition's claims to all the virtue and all the patriotism in the city, from the end of a cart, saw them together among his auditors, marked their laughter, their close, idle comradeship—and was moved thereby to conclude his remarks with a virulence which banished some of the merriment from Hilda's face. Afterward, when she was again moved to laughter by the exquisite humor of her own reflections, there was a tinge of personal bitterness in her mirth.

CHAPTER X.

It was the Sunday night before the first Monday in November, and the two parties were busily engaged in assuring the public that victory was fore-ordained for each one. At Number Twenty-seven, the good voters were a little restive. They had been subjected to such a grilling of investigation since their registration that life had been scarcely worth the living. However, they had remembered their lessons very well, and had not been shaken in their account of themselves. The fishy eye of Mr. Maguire had been closely upon

them during the greater part of their residence in his house, and they were harassed and irritated by it. Especially were they irked by his latest dictum—namely, that they would be obliged to keep moderately sober until after they had done their patriotic duty by the city on Tuesday morning.

"I won't have you so drunk you couldn't tell one emblem from another—an eagle from a star or a sun or a turkey. I won't have you so drunk you'll be blabbin' your affairs an' mine to the first pretty, pink-faced boy of a watcher that you see at the polls. No, sirs. You'll be sober from now till Tuesday."

To Maguire they dared not complain. Something grim, relentless, in the man cowed their blustering speech. To Harry Larrigan, who had, as they put it, "let them in for this," they were less reticent. They demanded of him what he meant by it—if they wasn't goin' to have a drop to wet their throats until after Tuesday mornin', an' if he thought that was the way to treat friends? Larrigan replied with so much heat, with such a determination to back up Maguire's orders, as almost to suggest that he was anxious, by his extreme allegiance to Maguire in this matter, to compensate for some lack elsewhere.

It was, on the whole, rather a sullen and disgruntled household which sprawled over the front room on that Sunday night. Some of the men had made their escape from close espionage during the day, and were recounting their adventures in various haunts and resorts. Others were playing cards, and some were half dozing over the gaudy pages of the Sunday papers. One leaned out a front window, saluting passers-by with much friendliness and humor.

By and by the gentleman on the window sill rather exceeded himself in witty salutations. Apparently the person whom he addressed was something of a character, too, for the man in the window frequently laughed with much heartiness, and at last his comrades heard him say:

"Well, I don't care if I do, Bud, though it looks to me like you had done your full share of the same durin' this bright an' beauteous Sabbath. Holy smoke! Is that what you've been carryin'?"

Some of the other men in the room crowded toward the window to see the cause of their associate's astonishment. What they beheld was a very much inebriated individual hanging to the iron post at the foot of the stone steps and proudly showing his flask—a generous bottle which seemed capable of holding half a gallon and quite incapable of being concealed in any ordinary pocket.

"Ast yer friend in, Shorty," advised the last comer to the window sill. "He looks to me like what we're all a-waitin' for."

"Come on up, Bud," called Shorty. The drunkard hung back and assumed an air of great caution. He required to be assured that he was going into a "per-fec'ly respec-able place," an' that there would be no one "but frien's" present. He hinted that there were enemies on his track, and he looked back over his shoulder as he spoke.

"Aw, come on up, you an' the stuff," said Shorty briskly. "We're all on the level. Come on in."

The stranger started to comply, hung back, was persuaded to come again, and finally advanced, offering not only to share the contents of his amazing flask with his new-found friends, but to entertain them with song and story as well. Very few, he declared, equaled him in telling a good story or in singing a good song.

When he entered the room in which the men were lounging, he was seen to be a ragged and unkempt-looking creature who had used a purely individual, not to say anarchistic, style in dressing, and who had omitted from his attire much which is usually considered necessary. Not only was he guiltless of necktie and collar, but he also lacked a shirt above his heavy gray merino one. His original complexion was hidden beneath several days' growth of black beard, his hair was uncombed, and he was unmistak-

ably and entirely drunk. He was, indeed, so drunk that after an abortive attempt to fight one man and an equally abortive attempt to prove another his blood brother, he sank down by the table, put his arms upon it, laid his head upon his arms, and fell into a stertorous slumber. The others drank his whisky, commented casually upon him, and let him lie there all night.

"Pore devil," said Shorty, moved to sentiment by the sight of the graceless figure, "we might take him to the polls with us of a Tuesday morning an' have him vote some dude's name before the dude was awake." It was the sense of the meeting that this would be a very amusing jest, indeed.

The next day the visitor's high spirits had subsided. He sat silent, huddled and shivering in a corner. He reproached them bitterly for drinking his last drop of whisky, and complained of chill, of the cure for which their most unbrotherly conduct had robbed him. Then later he complained of fever and declared that a cool drink would be his salvation. Occasionally, when he was very abusive, they threatened to put him out, and when he fell silent again, after begging them not to give him up to his enemies—Shorty finally made it out that the stranger designated his wife and her people by this name—they let him alone. When their meals were brought them from the Old Farm saloon, they offered to share with him. But he shuddered with repulsion and fell into his lethargy again.

He had been with them nearly twenty-four hours, and Ellena Street was stamping out the embers of its last pre-election gutter bonfire, from tenement windows the children were being shrilly summoned home, when an ambulance clanged noisily around the corner. In bedtime deshabille most of the inhabitants of the street looked forth from their windows. The wagon proceeded slowly, stopping at each house. Questions were asked not only by the alert-looking, blond young man on the settee that ran back from the driver's seat, but by the policeman who swung on the rear step. The men at Twenty-

seven crowded to their windows, and idly watched and commented upon the unusual scene.

Finally the ambulance stopped before Twenty-seven. Shorty, the most communicative of the colony, ran to the front door to open it to the policeman who was ringing the bell. Bernard Maguire, his face heavy and forbidding, was already on the steps.

"Lookin' for a smallpox escape," announced the policeman, with brevity. "Seen anything of any runaway stranger?"

"No, no, certainly not," Mr. Maguire obtruded himself upon the officer's attention.

The young hospital surgeon looked at him out of very bright, keen blue eyes.

"Your residence?" he demanded tersely. "No? Then why——"

"But I own the place—I'm runnin' a boardin' house here," cried Maguire. "There ain't no——"

In the hall a shriek sounded. The convivial stranger had crept out after the other men, and had peered through the open door where they stood clustered while the surgeon and Maguire talked.

"Don't let him get me; don't let them take me," he shouted; and as he cried out, the men fell back from him. He ran from one to the other, to be fled with horror by all of them.

"I guess we've found him, officer," said the surgeon. "Sorry, my man," this to Maguire, "but he's the fellow I'm looking for. His family gave him over to us yesterday after having kept his sickness concealed long enough to threaten the whole city with the epidemic—and somehow, he got away from the detention pavilion last night. We were on the wrong tack all day, but some one gave us this clue this evening. Officer, quarantine the place. How many have been exposed? Condit," calling to another hospital official in the wagon, "come on. He's here."

All the time the man was raving. The other men were cowering into corners, were looking at one another out of hostile, suspicious eyes, were edging

away from one another. One man had crept back to the front room and was measuring the distance from the window to the ground with his eyes. The surgeon saw him.

"Get back there, you," he ordered. "Officer, you will take charge here to see that no one enters or leaves this house until the quarantine is removed."

With the aid of his assistant, he bundled the struggling, cursing patient into the closed wagon. He stopped for a second to listen, apparently with a sportsman's interest, to Mr. Maguire's oaths and demands to know which blithering fool had let that pesthouse stray into his building. Shorty, the once popular, tried to escape the prominence thus thrust upon him. Harry Larrigan listened to the profanity and the recriminations dully. He had been intending to take certain moneys which would be his on the morrow and to join his sister in the piny retreat whence she wrote that she was regaining her health; he had intended to stay there long enough for certain charges and counter-charges to have been made and threshed out—and, pray Heaven, forgotten! He might, perhaps, stay forever, if his affidavit were used. He had a sickening premonition of what Mr. Maguire's revenge was likely to be if he were made aware that one of his creatures had sold him out.

And while Larrigan, white-faced and, like all the rest, shrinking from his fellows, thought over his position in the affair, Maguire stormed along the pavement outside—yet at a safe distance from the house. A good many of the neighbors had come tumbling out into the sidewalk to learn exactly what had happened. At the settlement across the street, the residents were clustered at the front windows. Hilda St. George was watching the scene with wide, fixed eyes; her breath came pantingly between her pale lips. When at last she saw the shrieking wretch dragged to the ambulance, its doors closed upon him, the policeman left in inexorable charge, and Bernard Maguire pacing the pavement in helpless wrath, she breathed more freely.

She had turned away from the window, and was suggesting that a pick-up supper would be quieting to the nerves before sleeping, when the telephone on her office desk tinkled faintly. She answered the call, her face white and frightened again. Her preliminary answers were barely whispers. Then she laughed in a relieved way.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Fitzhugh," she cried. "I didn't recognize your voice at first. There's a horrid buzzing—I can't make out what you are saying? Oh! 'How is the cause of truth and righteousness on the eve of the battle?'" Her eyes darkened and her voice was harsh with a sharp suspicion. "What do you mean? What have— Oh, you really meant it? Well, it's kind of you to inquire. We're all well and hopeful to the point of blatant certainty. Accept my condolences in advance! Yes. No. Of course. Good night."

When she emerged again to the group of girls strolling through the hall to the refrigerator in the basement, there was a moisture on her forehead.

"Why, Hilda, dear," cried Katherine Vaughan, "I really believe you're taking this campaign harder than the candidates. You're all unstrung! You want to look out, or you'll be an argument against woman's suffrage. Can't you hear some platitudinous old party booming forth a great thought to the effect that 'women are not nervously fitted to bear the rigors of such campaigns as we in America wage every few years? Whatever the elevating effect of their high honesty, their delicate conscience, upon our politics, we must think of the effect of our politics upon them?' Look out, or you'll be the text for some such reactionary sermon as that!"

Hilda had winced when the "high honesty" and "delicate conscience" of women were mentioned. When Katherine, whose one gift was a power of mimicry, had finished her burlesque speech, the other girl cried out pettishly:

"Oh, do leave me alone!" And then she ran abruptly to her room.

CHAPTER XI.

Election day dawned doubtfully—not in the rainy weather which the present powers regarded as their best ally, believing some ancient tradition that the opposition feared to wet its feet and avoided all physical discomfort; not in the bright sunshine which, by the rule of contraries, ought to have brought out a large "silk-stockinged" vote. But it was dubious—like the outcome of the fray. At an early hour the rank and file of the voters were making their way to their appointed polling places. Maguire, in his district, had, with characteristic philosophy, accepted the inevitable at Number Twenty-seven, and was engaged in getting out those votes which he could.

At the Benson Memorial House there was much activity. A large tank of coffee steamed upon the kitchen range, the girls were busy buttering bread and making sandwiches. These refreshments were designed to comfort and sustain the watchers at the polls—primarily the watchers for the reform side. Not for one instant must one of those young men be absent from his post of duty.

Two of the girls, full of ardor, were detailed to assist the reform captain of the block in the work of getting out those voters for their side who had been stricken overnight with indolence, illness, misgivings, or the excellence of Mr. Maguire's argument. It was soon found necessary to have a carriage for the conveyance of some of the faltering brethren. Dora Gibson telephoned this fact to Hilda, presiding over the coffee making.

"Get one, then!" cried Hilda. "Get two—twenty! Tell Wright to send you one at—where are you? Oh, at the Dorgans?"

In five more minutes Dora telephoned again that Wright, the local liveryman, had replied with a chuckle that the other side had engaged his every vehicle for the whole day.

"Oh, indeed!" commented Hilda sharply. "Very well—call me up again in five minutes."

Then she telephoned uptown to two of her friends. When Dora communicated with her again she answered jubilantly:

"It is all right. Judge Harcourt's touring car and Evelyn de Peyster's will be here in half an hour. We are to have the use of them all day."

There were the customary challenges at the booths, the customary haling of doubted voters into court, the customary arrests. At one polling place in the neighborhood, a gang of toughs, subsidized for the purpose by Mr. Schatz, tried to intimidate voters of the opposition from casting their ballots. It was scarcely worth the voter's while to seek the protection of the police, for their sympathies happened to be with the cause of the assailants. When Brewster, half in despair over this phase of the situation, telephoned to Hilda, she once more took charge. Again she did some telephoning, and in an hour a group of burly football players from one of the universities uptown were lounging on the opposite side of the street from Reddy Lochlin's gang. It was a characteristic of Mr. Lochlin's gang not to fight unless their opponents were obviously fewer or weaker than themselves. They looked at the boys across on the other sidewalk—lads whose beaming faces bespoke them "spoiling" for a fight—and they molested no more voters in that district.

And so the day wore on, and five o'clock came, and outside every polling place a crowd of late comers complained bitterly of being denied the glorious right of suffrage, and looked at watches and quoted unofficial timepieces to prove that there was still ample opportunity for them, under the law, to declare their political preferences, and were shoved away. And the counting began, and the evening came. Newspaper transparencies flashed figures from sparsely settled districts; in restaurants, crowded with throngs who were putting a festive close to what was, for the vast majority of the citizens, merely a holiday, returns were displayed from time to time. In the theatres, between the acts, the orches-

tras played patriotic airs and the audiences hummed the tunes; and here, too, the returns were announced. The streets were alive with a good-natured mob; horns tooted, clumsy jests were played, bonfires burned in cross-street gutters.

It was half-past eleven before Hilda, out with Fred Ransom and a crowd of girls and men from the settlement, knew that her heart's desire had been given to her. On the great transparency in front of the *Herald* office a long list was displayed; not only had the so-called reform party gained a victory throughout the city in general, but in her own district the candidates of Schatz and Maguire had been defeated. By how close a margin the victory had been won, it made her tremble to see. If those men at Twenty-seven, for example, had not been quarantined, how different might the result have been! She felt faint and shuddered. Ransom, who was piloting her, felt the convulsive movement.

"You're all worn out, Hilda," he said contritely. "I ought not to have allowed you to come into this Bedlam-let-loose. What would your mother say to me? Never mind! I've reserved a table for ten at Sherry's. Let us marshal our forces and go and get some grub."

For a moment she hesitated. It seemed to her more than she could bear in her nervous state. Then she thought of the others whose plans would be upset by her whim.

"Who's to be there?"

"Gertrude and Dick Vanalstyne, to play propriety—Gertrude promised to meet us there. And the rest are just ourselves—the three other girls from the House and Brewster, Whitaker, and Goynor."

"All right," said Hilda faintly.

She was deeply disappointed in the effects of victory. Where was the glow, the exultation, the abandon of joyousness she had expected? Where was the superb sense of power at last proved? She only felt tired and unstrung; and, across her mood, Randolph Fitzhugh's mocking face flitted. His

eyes seemed bent upon her in a contempt that was half affectionate, half sad. She shivered.

"Fred," she cried, "that was an awful thing—an awful thing—that we did!"

Fred looked at her inquiringly. Then he understood and laughed.

"That? That was a fine piece of acting. Maguire ought to get a star from the Comedy Club to help him with his campaigns. Now, don't you go to being remorseful and—and womanish, Hilda! You can't fight pitch with rose water, you know."

Summoning their cohorts, they boarded a car and were borne out of the maelstrom to the brilliantly lighted, softly carpeted, decorously luxurious atmosphere of the restaurant. Gertrude Vanalstyn and her husband awaited them. She congratulated Hilda and her brother upon the result of the election with the indifferent air of a woman felicitating children upon a new toy.

When the gay supper was over, and the settlement portion of the party had gone down into their own regions again, Ransom detained Hilda for a minute in the hallway. He looked pale, and all the laughter, the high spirits, the assurance were gone from his manner.

"When may I see you to-morrow?" he asked abruptly.

She shot a startled glance at him. A refusal trembled on her lips.

"You've got to, Hilda—you've got to," he forestalled her words.

"Very well—I'll be at home at three," she said.

After all, she asked herself, why not? He was interested in all that she cared for so fervently; together they might do wonderful things. And to-night she felt a weak necessity for companionship, comprehension—love.

CHAPTER XII.

In the settlement drawing-room—all brasses from the Russian quarter and mission furniture and green ferns and classic photographs—Fitzhugh faced Miss St. George.

"What is it your old friend Shake-

speare says?" he drawled. The girl had felt her heart ache at a certain drawn, defeated look on his face, a listlessness in his bearing. "I'm no good at quotation, but he devotes a sonnet, you may remember, to entreating his friend to hit him when he's already down, and not to let him rise, and then to fell him."

"It sounds highly Shakespearian," said Miss St. George politely.

Fitzhugh smiled. She noticed that there were dark lines under his eyes; she felt a quick yearning over him.

"Well, I haven't outlined it poetically, I confess. But I'm in a similar case. I'd like to take all my drubbings in a bunch and start fresh again. Perhaps you've guessed that I've had the astounding impertinence to love you?"

He raised his heavy eyes to her face now. She colored hotly, miserably.

"You must not characterize such—an honor to me as an impertinence," she faltered. "Although—our natures, our aims—all that we mean to do in life—are so dissimilar that I am sure it is only a passing—"

"Please don't!"

At that instant there was a heavy tramping in the hall outside the drawing-room. Bernard Maguire, his face purple with anger, burst unceremoniously into the room.

"So, ma'am!" he cried, shaking a clinched hand at Hilda. "So that was your little game, was it? 'The quarantine has been removed.' 'There had been a mistake made,' had there? 'The suspect had nothing worse than a case of extreme drunkenness,' hadn't he? But—you—you and your precious doctor— Oh, I've seen him hanging around you! I don't ask what he is to you, but whatever he is, you'll do the rest of your philanderin' in jail!"

"Are you insane, Maguire!" Fitzhugh had gained sufficient presence of mind to interrupt the irate politician's flow of speech.

"Insane? Ask that—that—hussy there—"

A blow planted on Mr. Maguire's mouth by the assistant district attorney's fist stopped his scurrility for a

minute. Meantime Hilda had recovered herself.

"I don't know what you are talking about, Mr. Maguire," she answered steadily, and her firm voice seemed to bring some decent power of self-restraint into the man, "but this I do know; that I have in my possession—and have had since the day you made your bargain for colonizers in Jersey City—an affidavit signed by one of your fellow plotters and duly witnessed, confessing the whole affair; the fact that your hirelings were prevented from voting has made it unnecessary for me to have this document produced. Had one of those men appeared at the polls yesterday, he would have been challenged and the paper shown."

She spoke bravely, but her heart pounded against her side. She knew how Brewster's faint-hearted forebodings as to the difficulties of challenging and contesting had made her abandon the legitimate for the illegitimate method of fighting her foe; but she didn't want Randolph Fitzhugh to know it.

Maguire was silent a minute when she had finished speaking.

"Shall I put him out, Hilda?" asked Randolph, and she thrilled to note that he had unconsciously used her first name.

"It won't be necessary," interpolated Maguire. "I'm going. I won't call you to account for that blow, Mr. Fitzhugh—though I may remember it. But I don't altogether blame you. She's worth it." He nodded toward Hilda, and a slow smile passed over his broad, heavy face. "By gad, you'd have made a leader worth havin' if you'd been on our side." With which generous tribute he acknowledged himself checkmated and went out.

The two who remained looked at each other, the woman disturbed, ashamed, the man searching. Finally he said bitterly:

"You must have wanted to defeat me terribly—to do a thing like that—to take a risk like that!"

She wanted to deny the implication of his words, but something held her

tongue-tied. She could not lie to him. And suddenly she remembered that a year ago Hilda St. George was not accustomed to lie to any one, to be in positions requiring falsehood and double dealing for her safe extrication.

A clock in the room struck three. Fitzhugh, with a shadow on his face, stood by the window. A fair-haired man, alert, victorious, full of hope and gayety, ran up the steps. Nothing could long keep down Fred Ransom's volatile cheer. He saw Fitzhugh at the window and waved his hand.

"Here comes—the victor—for the spoils, I'm thinking," said Fitzhugh, turning again into the room. He looked at Hilda with something infinitely protecting, grieving, loving, in his eyes, and held out his hand.

"See how far the dirty game has dragged you from your old moorings," he said gently. "Lord—I'm no preacher, but you see, don't you, that it isn't the game for you?"

She shook her head obstinately. She clutched at untruth.

"You misunderstand—you believed the ridiculous charges of that—that reptile——"

"The Dragon?" Fitzhugh smiled, and so did Hilda, at the old recollection. "But weren't they true?" He measured her with eyes and voice. Was she going to lie to him?

And then Ransom was ushered into the room—buoyant and cheerful.

"Hello, Fitzhugh," he greeted his rival when he had shaken Hilda's hand, "are they playing the 'Dead March' down in your diggings? Why don't you come over to the side of the fellows who win?"

"Good-by, Miss St. George," Fitzhugh said, when he had replied to the boy's nonsense fittingly.

"Good-by," said Hilda heavily.

"It's really good-by," continued Fitzhugh. "There's an opening for me in Seattle—in view of yesterday I am thinking of taking it. My resignation is in Bancroft's hands, and I'm going out there to look around a bit before deciding."

"To Seattle?"

"Oh, come now, Fitzhugh, don't take a little whipping so hard," advised Fred Ransom. "There are more elections to come; and maybe New York will tire of pure politics sooner than you think."

But Fitzhugh, with a smile and a shake of the head, went out of the room. Hilda watched the door for a second. Then she turned to Ransom.

"It was a famous victory, wasn't it, Fred? And it only cost me my honor—and that man's respect."

Fred looked at her with eyes suddenly stabbed to seriousness.

"Do you care for—that man's respect—so much?"

"More than for anything else in the world," she answered passionately. The young doctor sat a long time looking at the floor. When he raised his face it was gray with pain.

"I think you're telling me that partly to spare me something. Well—it's good of you. I won't bother you with what I meant to say."

"Dear old Freddie"—she spoke to him with a sisterly pity—"you know

you'll forget—what you thought you meant to say—in a month or two. And when you do, everything is going to be just the same, isn't it?"

"Oh, of course!" He laughed a little bitterly. Then he grew gentler. "At any rate, when I have forgotten," he said, "everything will be the same again. And"—with a desperate generosity—"Fitzhugh's a fine fellow."

He was gone with that, and Hilda was alone—aimlessly alone. She tried to attend to her multifarious duties as the head of the settlement. But her mind seemed paralyzed. It held but two ideas—Fitzhugh's face reproaching her for ideals smirched and fair honor soiled, and Fitzhugh's face set toward Seattle.

She walked back and forth in her office. Time after time she approached the telephone. Finally, with a look of reckless resolve, she took down the receiver and called up the district attorney's office. And, at that motion of entire surrender, her face blossomed swiftly into a flower of radiant joy and peace.



When the Scene Changes

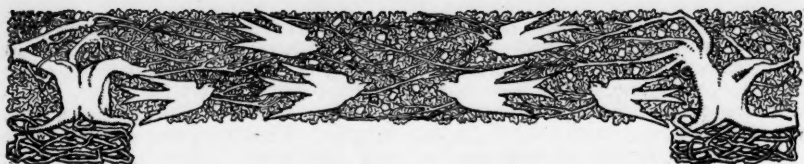
I.

UPON the hills above the sunny vale,
Where rippling Arno's silver ribbon gleams
And Florence sleeps through regal summer hours,
A lovely princess, smiling in her dreams,
I roam, and gaze o'er the enchanted land
From tower and palace of the storied town
To distant mountains, wrapped in purple pomp,
Rolled upward to the Apennine's snow crown.

II.

The valley's many glowing charms allure,
But, as I look upon them all to-day,
The colors fade, the golden lights grow dim.
My thoughts are turning tenderly away
To the green shadows of a quiet dell
In a dear land beyond the wastes of sea,
Where, under arching boughs of stately elms,
'Mid lilac blooms, my old home waits for me.

GRACE E. CRAIG.



Realism in Opera

By Rupert Hughes

Author of "Modern French Opera," "The Greatest of Opera Composers,"
"The Great Melodists of Italy," etc.

MAKING the commonplace seem real is one of the hardest things in art. Almost anything suffices to represent a fairy queen performing a miracle, but audiences become exigent when the problem is the presentation of a policeman arresting a chauffeur.

We know so little about fairies that we are afraid to criticise their details; they may be correct after all. I remember Mr. Henry T. Finck's noble defense of a certain dragon used at the Metropolitan Opera House in a production of "Siegfried."

The dragon came forth from his den breathing fire—red-globed lights—and venomous vapors—from the steam radiators. As usual, the audience was more amused than impressed by *Siegfried's* heroic onslaught on the papier-mache reptile swung from a wire and vocalizing via megaphone. Some of the critics ventured to fasten on the dragon that terrible epithet "unconvincing." Mr. Finck, always alert to protect things Wagnerian from harm, rallied round the flag and wrote something like this:

Though certain people have declared that the dragon does not look like a dragon, I can only say that I never saw a dragon that looked otherwise.

When we leave the *aéroplane* of fancy and descend to the hard soil of fact, the humblest gallery god feels himself a credentialed critic, and every step is danger, every button a target.

The romantic Italians have turned

to the utmost realism in many of their arts in recent years, sometimes with brilliant results, sometimes with disastrous effect. Certain of their sculptors have actually succeeded in making cemeteries comic by their efforts at representing in marble grieving relatives as they would actually look. One sees melancholy widowers in marble trousers and marble silk hats, and weeping widows in marble bonnets and even in marble bustles; and one cannot but smile.

Of course, in a higher view, these are far less ludicrous than the usual so-called angels, i. e., barefoot ladies in nightgowns, with bird's wings on their shoulder blades, leaning on broken columns and things. But we are accustomed to the alleged angels, and we can only say with Mr. Finck that we never saw angels that looked different.

Still, the very effort at carving real human beings in real postures is highly to be praised for its sincerity, if not for its success. Some day somebody will learn the trick of making a modern man look better than a dummy as a statue.

Success will come, however, only to the few because the many shall have experimented and failed, leaving horrible examples of what not to do.

In the opera houses of Italy the same realistic spirit is rampant to a degree found nowhere else, except perhaps in Paris. The librettists have done better than the marble-yard journeymen, and some of the greatest successes in

recent opera have been startlingly modern and startlingly true. In this respect the Italian school is in violent contrast with the German.

The nearest that Wagner ever came to realism in all his operas was the choice of *Hans Sachs* for the hero, or the first old man, of his one comic opera, "The Mastersingers." *Hans Sachs* actually lived, but it was some time ago—he was born two years after Christopher Columbus invented America. He was a cobbler who did not stick to his last; for he wrote more than four thousand poems, seventeen hundred tales, and two hundred dramatic works, besides a number of melodies. *Hans Sachs* certainly never did the things he does in Wagner's opera, but he is a most delightful soul, and it is helpful to know that some such man once existed.

The next most realistic opera of Wagner's is "Tristan and Isolde," and this is based on old romance, besides including as a vital element in its plot a magic love potion. There were "Minnesingers" as there were "Mastersingers"; and in "Tannhäuser" we find the names of real poets of the thirteenth century, but Tannhäuser himself is shown in the realm of *Venus*, and *Venus* struggles with the Church for his soul.

Lohengrin makes his entrance from nowhere, in a boat drawn by an enchanted swan. "The Flying Dutchman" and "Parsifal" are as unreal as any other fairy stories, and the four operas of the Ring series are based upon the fantastic myths of Teutonic gods.

So Wagner cannot be said to have contributed much to realism. His orchestrations were modern and his career was full of revolutions and realities, but his art kept aloof from life to the utmost.

This has been the case with a large portion of all German opera. Weber, the first nationally German composer, based his "Der Freischütz" on legends of black magic, and so his countrymen have reveled in elfin lore down to Humperdinck, whose "Hänsel and Gretel" is almost Mother Goose. Strauss has

made opera of the sacrilegious legend of "Salome," and has turned back all the way to Greek tragedy in "Electra."

The Italian opera composers have shown a far greater interest in humanity untroubled by gods, goddesses, or pixies. Beethoven's one opera was Italian in school and spirit, and Mozart's were all Italian, except for the crazy plot of his "Magic Flute," written in German. In his "Don Giovanni," indeed, he has a statue come down from its pedestal and enter the dining room of the villain; but in his "Marriage of Figaro" everything is as realistic as comic opera could well permit.

Italian opera has been full enough of absurdities, heaven knows; but they are absurdities of dramatic license. The librettists rarely invite attention to the antics of mythical beings, or ask your tears for the distress of a lonesome goddess or a half-witted hero who wanders into a magic flower garden.

The Italians have stuck to history, historical romances, or realistic dramas for the vast majority of their plots. If Rossini's "William Tell" is not exactly history, it is evident that Rossini believed in Tell's existence, and the opera contains no magic. Bellini wrote "Norma," the story of a Druid priestess. Some historians say there were no Druids, but *Norma* does nothing, so to say, supernatural. Verdi, in his "Aida," chose an old Egyptian tradition, but used no magic in the plot.

Popular novels and plays of a romantic but not fantastic sort have always appealed to the Italians. Sir Walter Scott created the original "Lucia di Lammermoor"; Victor Hugo the original "Rigoletto"; Dumas the original "Traviata"; Shakespeare the original "Othello" and "Falstaff."

Latter-day Italian composers have come still closer to earth, and we find in "Pagliacci" a bit of real life taken from the police court; in "A Basso Porto" a Black Hand tragedy of the slums of Naples; in "La Bohème" the romance of shabby students and seamstresses; in "La Colonia Libera" an operization of a Bret Harte's story; in

"Cavalleria Rusticana" the story of a sort of Kentucky feud in Sicily.

It is really amazing how closely the Italians of to-day are yoking art and realism. I have in earlier articles described the masterpieces of Italian opera, down to the last works of Verdi. With him ended an epoch. Overlapping the conclusion of its history is the beginning of the new school.

In a sense, the new school owes its origin to a prize competition, though competitions have generally been rather fruitless. In 1890 the Italian music publisher and impresario, Sonzogno, offered a purse for a one-act opera. The award was made to an obscure conductor in a small town. His name was Pietro Mascagni, son of a baker. Rossini's mother was a baker's daughter, by the way. He composed the music in a little more than a week, and the prize lifted him from anonymous poverty to world-wide fame.

As usual, success brought upon him a shower of critical arrows, but he deserved what glory he got, and it is a pity that his later efforts have disappointed him and fortified the adversaries of his success.

The libretto was based upon a story by Giovanni Verga, called "Rustic Chivalry," or "Cavalleria Rusticana." Before the rise of the curtain a wildly sweet Sicilian love song is heard from a peasant, *Turiddu*, who has loved a peasant girl, *Santuzza*, but tiring of her has taken up with an earlier flame, now the wife of *Alfio*, who drives an express wagon between towns.

The curtain rises on the square before the church. The peasants go to mass. *Santuzza*, who has been excommunicated, lingers to ask *Turiddu's* mother where he is. She is told that he is out of town, but she says she has seen him in the village. *Alfio* arrives with his team and asks for *Turiddu*, only to be told the same story, and to deny it.

Turiddu himself appears, saying that he has just returned. *Santuzza* gives him the lie; she saw him coming from *Lola's* house at daybreak. *Lola* passes, humming a light flower song. She is

jealous of *Santuzza* and enters the church without speaking. *Turiddu* upbraids *Santuzza* for the snub; and when she appeals for her love again, reviles her and goes to mass. The betrayed and deserted *Santuzza* warns *Alfio* of his wife's faithlessness, and he vows revenge.

To indicate the time of the mass, an orchestral intermezzo is played. This number is so beautiful and made such a sweep of the world that the very word intermezzo has almost come to mean this majestic lyric.

The peasants now file out of the church, and *Lola* hurries home, fearing to linger with *Turiddu* lest her husband miss her. *Turiddu* invites the chorus to join him in wine—and the usual wine song. When *Alfio* passes, *Turiddu* extends the invitation to him. The husband answers that the wine would be poison to him.

Turiddu offers him satisfaction and, according to the Sicilian method of giving and accepting a challenge to duel, the men embrace, and *Alfio* bites *Turiddu* on the ear; then leads the way to the field of honor.

Turiddu pauses to bid his mother farewell, and, with a spark of remorse, begs her to care for *Santuzza*. Then he hurries away, leaving his mother anxious and mystified. In the distance the blood feud is fought, and the women watch in terror. A scream is heard: "*Turiddu* is slain!" *Santuzza* faints, and the opera is over.

Its success is due to the full-blooded passion of the music and its unusual melodiousness. For all its enjoyable qualities, the airs are never false to the picture, and the opera has the grip of reality.

Poor Mascagni has never been able to repeat the success of this opera, though he has written several others. One of these, "The Maskers," was produced simultaneously in six Italian cities, and failed in all six. His opera "Iris," with a Japanese subject, was done in Rome in 1898, with little success, revised and reproduced in Milan a year later with somewhat better luck. Mascagni came to America with it, but

his tour was badly managed. Much of the music is extremely strong and beautiful, but Luigi Villari in his book on "Italian Life" condemns it sternly. He says:

The libretto evinces the most complete ignorance of everything connected with the Land of the Rising Sun, and is moreover grossly indecent. The music contains a few good passages, but is full of plagiarisms. Hearing it for the first time, one recognizes to pass judgment on a composer who has produced one really good short opera, followed by all this mass of poor stuff.

But to have written one great opera is to have written one more than most composers achieve. Gray wrote only one "Elegy," but it keeps his name green.

Somewhat similar to Mascagni's history is that of Ruggiero Leoncavallo, whose first and only success was produced two years after Mascagni's opera. It is called "The Strolling Players" (I Pagliacci), and it has been twinned with "Cavalleria Rusticana" in world-wide fame. Leoncavallo has made many efforts, but has never chimed the gong again. Villari finds "I Pagliacci" commonplace throughout, and says of a later opera, "I Medici," that it "lacks inspiration, and is full of the most palpable plagiarisms. Passages are absolutely copied from Wagner, Verdi, Schumann, and Meyerbeer." Leoncavallo had the uneasy distinction of being invited to set to music a libretto called "Roland," by His Versatility William II of Germany. But they fell into the pit together.

For "I Pagliacci," the composer was his own librettist, and the text is perhaps more to credit for the triumph than the score. It is one of the few grand opera librettos that is constructed with genius. It is a masterpiece of dramatic management of material, a tragedy within a farce. I have been told that the author's father was a judge and that the story transpired in a murder trial before him.

Mascagni began his opera with a tenor solo behind the curtain; Leoncavallo begins his with a baritone solo before the curtain. One of the char-

acters, a hunchbacked clown, steps forth and begs the audience to hear his prologue. It is a famous prologue, and in graceful verse and graceful melody the singer promises the audience that it is to see "a sketch from life," reminding them that actors after all are human, and that they have their joys and heartaches as well as the rest.

The curtain rises on a village in Calabria. The peasants are called together by a cracked trumpet and a thumped drum to be told that there is to be, as it were, "a show in the town hall to-night." In a donkey cart, led by a hunchback, *Tonio*, arrive the star, *Canio*, the leading woman, his wife, *Nedda*, and the tenor, *Beppo*.

Some of the peasants invite the men to drink; *Tonio* says he must stay to currycomb the donkey. A peasant hints that he is staying to flirt with *Nedda*. *Canio* laughs, but insists that while he plays the hoodwinked husband on the stage, off the stage he would not endure it. He assures them that he loves his wife and she him; then he goes to the tavern.

The deformed *Tonio* makes love to *Nedda*, and in her contempt she slashes him with the whip. He slinks off, vowing to get even. *Nedda* has a lover, a villager, *Silvio*, and he steals in to beg her to leave the loathsome stage and come to him. *Tonio* sees the lovers and brings the husband, who arrives just in time to overhear *Nedda* promise to meet *Silvio* at night after the play.

Silvio escapes unrecognized, and *Canio*, broken-hearted, demands his name. *Nedda* refuses to disclose it, and he threatens to kill her. *Beppo* disarms him and warns him that he must go at once and make up for the performance. The distracted actor abhors his task and breaks forth in a song of wonderful, of pitiful bitterness.

On with the motley, the paint, and the powder! The people pay you and must have their laugh. What if Harlequin steals your Columbine? Laugh, Punchinello, and the mob will applaud. Laugh at your own bitter anguish, laugh at the agony rending your heart!

He gropes his way into the theatre,

and the curtain falls. The second act shows the same scene at night. The audience gathers and seats itself, chattering and laughing. *Nedda* collects the money and steals a word with *Silvio*. The curtain rises at length and shows *Nedda* as *Columbine* awaiting her lover *Harlequin*. Her husband *Punchinello* is away, and the servant clown, played by *Tonio*, has gone to get wine and food. He returns with laden basket and makes love. *Harlequin* arrives and kicks him out, only to take flight as the husband appears unexpectedly. *Columbine* calls to him that she will meet him at midnight.

Canio, dressed as the ludicrous *Punchinello*, is struck by the coincidence of the promised rendezvous, and loses self-control. *Nedda* tries to go on with the play, but her husband cannot continue. He demands her lover's name with increasing frenzy. She refuses and resumes her frivolous rôle. *Canio* tries to play his part, but breaks down with grief and rage, and the audience applauds his tears as a triumph of acting. *Nedda* reminds him that he is an actor only, but he cries that he is a man, and drawing a dagger, stabs her. The audience applauds the realism, but *Silvio*, seeing the truth, rushes forward and is killed by *Canio*. As he lets his weapon fall, the opera ends with his ghastly smile: "The comedy is finished."

Across the path of Leoncavallo came a deadly rival, Giacomo Puccini. Both men announced a musical version of Murger's novel "La Vie de Bohème." Both had success, but Puccini's work gradually effaced Leoncavallo's. Both made operas out of Sardou's "La Tosca," and again Puccini won the day. He has added another and far greater success, "Madame Butterfly," based on the play David Belasco and John Luther Long made out of the latter's story.

Puccini was born the same year as Leoncavallo, 1858. His first opera, "Le Villi," was produced when he was twenty-six. It was extended to two acts and done again, and it was given this season in New York, but with lit-

tle success. Two more operas followed. When he was thirty-eight he stumbled upon his "La Bohème" and, by virtue of the picturesqueness of the story and the ingratiating charm of the music, it has gone round the globe.

His characters are a group of poor young students—*Rudolph*, a poet; *Marcel*, a painter; *Schaunard*, a composer; and *Colline*, a student of philosophy. The first act shows the bare chill garret where they camp in the Latin Quarter. The poet uses a tragedy of his for fuel. The students laugh the landlord out of his ridiculous curiosity concerning the rent.

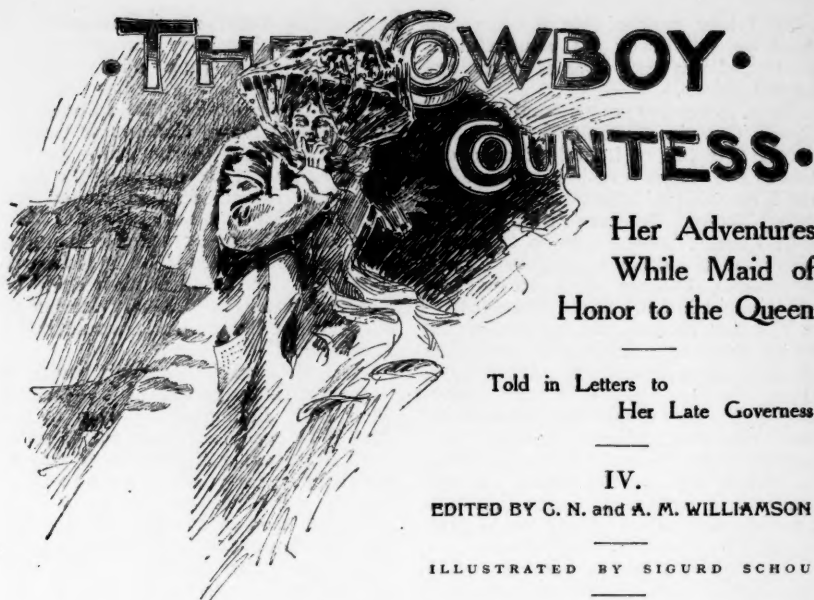
Mimi, an embroiderer, who lives in the house, enters to ask for a light. Her candle is blown out, she loses her key, and a romance begins with the poet.

The second act shows the Latin Quarter in full revelry. It is Christmas eve, and the crowds are hilarious. The painter meets an old flame, *Musette*, who had thrown him over for a rich old man. Now she throws the rich old man over for the poor young painter, and leaves him to pay the bill besides.

In the third act we find *Rudolph* and *Marcel* discussing their sweethearts. *Rudolph* says that he is going to leave *Mimi* because she is dying of consumption and he has no money to keep her in comfort. The poor girl overhears her death sentence and bids *Rudolph* a pathetic farewell, while *Marcel* and *Musette* have a wild quarrel. The contrasting motives form a quartette of curious interest.

The last act is the garret again. *Mimi* is brought in by *Musette*. The sick girl comes to die in the arms of the hungry artist. *Mimi* is delirious and longs for a muff for her cold little hands. The philosopher, *Colline*, determines to pawn his overcoat, and in a beautiful farewell of strange dignity he bids farewell to the "old friend whose pockets have sheltered philosophers and poets." He brings back the muff, and *Mimi* falls into her blissful last sleep.

The story is next to nothing, but the atmosphere of Bohemian tragedy and comedy is retained in the music,



Her Adventures
While Maid of
Honor to the Queen

Told in Letters to
Her Late Governess

IV.

EDITED BY G. N. and A. M. WILLIAMSON

ILLUSTRATED BY SIGURD SCHOU

SANDRINGHAM,
Monday.

DEAREST MADEMOISELLE:
You seem more excited about the "P. S." in my last letter than over the whole truth about the royal visit at Carmonceux Castle, although I flattered myself that I told the story fairly well. But I feel it a compliment that you should care more about my little private affairs than the attempted kidnapping of a Spanish prince.

You are a darling to worry because I "wondered if I were falling in love" with Captain O'Malley, who is supposed to be on the point of making a great match with somebody else!

Well, you dear old fuss, I was a silly girl to upset you with such a postscript, but it's too late now to repent what I said. You see, I was so used in old days to come and lay every thought at your feet—as a cat does with a mouse—that three thousand miles of space between us, and the fact that you are "governessing" another girl, haven't broken the habit.

That postscript was dashed down impulsively; but since I can't fib to you, I must confess that I'm still wondering, wondering whether I am a tiny bit in love or not—and the "betting" at present is, that I am—just a little!

As for the match in prospect, I don't think I went so far as to assert that it actually *is* being arranged. I must have written, "they say it is being arranged."

It was dear, gossipy old Lady Belington who told me something vaguely romantic, just before I met him at Carmonceux Castle. Anyhow, a pretty young German princess is said to have fallen hopelessly in love with Captain O'Malley. He is descended from Irish kings, though his brother, the head of the family now, is only an earl. I suppose the kingly blood is satisfactory to the German royalties, however, for *on dit* that Lord Kilgard, the elder brother—who is enormously rich, though Irish—and the princess' father are putting their heads together to promote the match. That's as far as it's gone, I believe—even as far as gossip has gone

—but I hear none of this at court, for the king and queen are wonderful in the tactful way they have of discouraging all gossip.

Now, to answer your second question about Captain O'Malley's Christian name. He has at least half a dozen! But as the "front" one is Edward, after the king, his godfather, he is generally called Teddy. To some of his intimate men friends, however, he is "Don," a nickname the other boys gave him at Sandhurst, because they chaffed him there about looking like a Spaniard.

Not that he does, really—except that he has those haunting, Celtic eyes which Spanish people and the Irish have. They are blue eyes, with black lashes and hair; and though his white forehead tells that he isn't very dark, he is tanned rather brown. When we stand or dance together he makes me feel quite little, so you can guess that he is over six feet tall—and you would guess right.

Perhaps if I hadn't seen him again for several weeks after the Carmonceux visit I should have forgotten him—more or less; but he and I have just been in quite a strange adventure together—the sort of adventure which, just to come through side by side, must make a man and a girl feel as if they had known each other well for years, instead of a very little for a few weeks.

Of course, it's rather difficult for a man to meet a maid of honor often when she's on duty. If he wants to see her he has to contrive ways. Of course, it would be conceited of me to think that Captain O'Malley would put himself to any such trouble for me; but I'll tell you what he did, and then you can judge, "without prejudice."

It seems to me that nearly all the British aristocracy is either related, or distantly connected somehow by marriage. Indeed, it's like a huge family, and everybody knows, or knows of everybody else. Captain O'Malley's mother—who is dead; and so is his father—was a forty-second cousin of Lady Bellington's; and after I'd happened to mention to him that she had been very good to me, it appears that

he suddenly became quite attentive to his elderly and scarcely known relative.

One day he brought a "middy" cousin to call upon her, who gave her the most wonderful accounts of a ball to be given at the Royal Naval College, at Greenwich. According to the sailor boy it would be one of the events of the age; and when the midddy had roused the dear old lady's interest, Captain O'Malley remarked, as if on a sudden thought, "Wouldn't it be nice if Lady Dalmarre could go! Don't you think it could be managed somehow? A pity for her to miss a sight like this. It would be so new to her."

If those weren't his exact words it isn't my fault, because it's verbatim what Lady Bellington reported to me. And if he really did want me to go to the ball, it was rather a clever way to set about it; for you have only to whisper the word "manage" to Lady B. to make her keen to arrange a thing. She said she thought the ball would be great fun—wasn't that sporting of her, considering that she's over seventy?—and that she wouldn't mind being my chaperon, if I were allowed to go.

With that, Captain O'Malley and his sailor-boy cousin said they would leave it all to Lady Bellington, which no doubt pleased her mightily, and put her on her mettle. But, after all, she wasn't obliged to be very Machiavellian, because Lady Maud's "wait" began two or three days before the night fixed for the Naval College ball. Consequently all that Lady Bellington had to do was to invite me to visit her, and the rest was simple. That is, it *seemed* simple; but wait till you hear!

Naturally, when it was arranged for me to be taken to Greenwich for a ball at the Naval College, I was excited, because, as Captain O'Malley had thought, it was something entirely novel; and besides, to tell the truth, it made it *much* more interesting to know that he would be there, too. He didn't say that it was for my sake he was going, so *perhaps* that had nothing to do with it; but I can't help drawing some flattering unction to my soul.

I had a lovely new dress of white

chiffon made for the ball; and two days before I arrived at Lady Bellington's. She had a slight cold, which she assured me would be well by the great night; but instead of growing better it grew worse; and at last it was clear that she wouldn't be able to stir out of the house for a week.

I did feel disappointed, but I was good as gold, just as you brought me up to be when other people's illnesses upset my plans. I said that I didn't mind a bit; and I tried not to—but I *was* glad when Lady Bellington said that her "flue" shouldn't interfere with my fun. She would get her great-niece, Mrs. Harry Guest, to take me to Greenwich in her motor car, and chaperon me at the ball.

I had never heard of Mrs. Harry Guest, but when Lady Bellington told me that she was the widow of an admiral, I expected her to be old—fifty at least—instead of which she turned out to be about twenty-five, and very pretty. It seems that she was dreadfully poor, and married a nice, kind old man when he was nearly sixty, and she wasn't much past sixteen. It was like going to a ball with a girl, except that she wore a lovely tiara—you see, she'd been out of mourning a year, and is as lively as a beautiful young bear just waked up from an all-winter's nap in a hollow tree—and we two went, with Captain O'Malley, to Greenwich in her gorgeous sixty-horsepower Manitou; and altogether, everything was too exciting and delightful to be properly expressed in mere words.

The Royal Naval College and the ball really have very little to do with the great adventure of the night; but it would seem a waste of good material not to tell you anything about either, so I'll just "glance" at both—as curates say in their first sermons.

Greenwich College is made up of I don't know how many huge, scholarly-looking buildings—the last place for anything so frivolous as a ball, you would think; but if you *did* think that, you'd be very much mistaken. There was an upstairs ballroom; and the saints—or perhaps middies—alone

know what it's for when it isn't balling; but, anyhow, they had made it look beautiful with as many Chinese lanterns as there were jewels in Aladdin's Cave; and on the walls were wooden shields, inscribed with the names of royal personages, in gold letters which glittered richly in the colorful light. Our own special middy, Charlie Brincke, told us that they were the names of people who had slept in that room, in days—or, rather, nights—gone by; but perhaps he only said this to be picturesque. I suppose you can never tell with a middy. No matter how that may be, he was a darling, with eyelashes about an inch long, and an inexhaustible supply of dimples. He knew Mrs. Guest so well that he called her Kitty, and I think he almost called me Peggy before the evening was over. Sailors have different ways from other men, but one can't possibly mind; besides, they all look so young, even the admirals, that you feel as if you were playing with nice boys.

There were so many different kinds of uniform at the ball that the long room had the air of being brilliantly decorated; and I never saw so many "flirtation traps," or sitting-out places, arranged by placing screens round two unblushing armchairs brought from the boys' "cabins," as they call their rooms. Captain O'Malley was one of the oldest dancing men there—so you can imagine how young most of them were; he isn't quite twenty-five—and he was much looked up to by youths who had come from Woolwich, to whom, naturally, he was a hero.

I never enjoyed dancing so much, not only because the floor was perfect, but because so were my partners; and don't be shocked—my chaperon wasn't—when I tell you I danced six times with Captain O'Malley, who was the best-looking man in the room. He took me in to supper—that is, he and I went with Mrs. Guest and "Charlie," and it was great fun. It seems the mess is the second biggest in the service—a huge room, with fearfully respectable-looking pillars—and is celebrated for its splendid silver ships and Nelson columns and countless cups, of course.

Dear little boys in blue, with bright buttons and white gloves, brought us things to eat; and because they wanted the ball to keep up till very late our hospitable hosts stopped all the clocks. We meant to have left at two, and the motor was ordered for a quarter of an hour earlier; but we were having such fun, we never thought about time, as no clocks were telling tales; so the first thing we knew we had stopped for the last dance of all. There was no mistaking it, because the Blue Viennese band began playing "God Save the King," directly it was over; and all the men in the different uniforms straightened up to stand at "attention" so loyally it brought a lump to my throat. At the same moment came the thought that

it must be very late, and Kitty and I turned and looked at each other with raised eyebrows.

After that we stood not upon the "order of our going," but went at once; that is, Charlie and Captain O'Malley took us down to the door, where we expected Mrs. Guest's gorgeous red automobile to come along in its turn and bear us luxuriously away to town.

There were loads of other less gorgeous ones; fat private cars, thin, eager taxis, unostentatious, yet dignified, electric broughams, and plenty of carriages; but time went—and so did vehicles of all sorts and conditions—without bringing anything for us. At last, when we had waited more than half an hour, and Captain O'Malley and Charlie Brincke

had made frantic inquiries in every possible direction, we began to realize that there must have been a mistake of some sort—an extraordinary mistake, because there seemed no excuse for even the smallest one.

When at last we gave up hope and held a council of war, all the motor cars and carriages had disappeared; and there wasn't even a lurking hansom or four-wheeler in sight. What to do was the question? Captain O'Malley tried to cheer up Mrs. Guest—I didn't need any cheering—by saying that he and Charlie would soon find something which would take us home, if it were only a "growler"; and after all, the distance wasn't much—not more than twelve miles.

Charlie, knowing Greenwich better than his cousin "Don," raced off and got other people to help him scour the by-



When we stand or dance together he makes me feel quite little.

ways and livery stables for something with wheels, while Teddy O'Malley and a sailor friend of Kitty's, Captain Lane, stopped with us. Another half hour went by in this way, and then Charlie returned, looking as sheepish and crest-fallen as if the contretemps were all his fault.

He had done his very, very best, and even telephoned to town, but could find nothing to take us—not even a wheelbarrow!

"Well, I must go home, if I have to walk," exclaimed Kitty Guest, "because my mother's staying with me, and she's dreadfully nervous and not very strong. I promised to speak to her when I got back, even if I had to wake her up; so if morning comes and she finds I'm not in she'll be ill with fright. She'll think we've had a motor smash."

On top of this I said that I should hate to worry Lady Bellington, too, for she, though a plucky old lady, had an idea that automobiles were first cousins to the evil one. "Suppose we *do* walk?" I suggested. "It's glorious weather, a heavenly sky, and I feel as if I could dance up to the stars without being tired. The whole distance is only twelve miles, you say; and when we get to the outskirts of London we're certain to come across a cab, even if we don't before, so we won't have to walk many miles."

Instead of discouraging this idea, Teddy O'Malley and Captain Lane seemed to think it was a good one, which brightened poor Charlie up considerably; and in the end, after a little further discussion, we all five set off together, walking through the grounds, and past what looked like miles and miles of dull iron railings, and tram lines. By and by it began to seem that we had *always* been walking, walking, in ill-lighted darkness, under gathering clouds—for though the night was warm, after a while there was a "feel" of rain in the air.

By this time we were out on a country—or country-ish—road; and even our high spirits might have been dashed by a sudden downpour of rain on our lovely frocks and Liberty satin coats!

"We must get something soon, or I'll have to commit robbery at the nearest farm," Captain O'Malley had just said, when Charlie called out "What's that?"

"That" was a big, lumbering, covered cart, whose gray-white tarpaulin glimmered ghostlike in the star dusk of the night, as it crawled out of another road into ours.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Teddy O'Malley. "There's a market cart on its way to Covent Garden. We'll hail it, and make them take us all on board."

"Ahoy!" shouted Charlie, and ran after the cart which had turned a corner not very far ahead of us. Soon he caught it up, but instead of stopping as we expected the great lumbering shape to do, to our surprise it began going faster, leaving Charlie behind. Evidently the driver had whipped up his horses, which had been going at a walk before.

"What an ungracious brute!" said Captain Lane.

"Perhaps," suggested Kitty, "he thinks Charlie a footpad, come to demand his vegetables or his life."

Whatever his thought might be, it was clear that Charlie didn't mean to be daunted by it. He started to run after the cart, and though we could see, by straining our eyes through the dark, that the horses had suddenly—probably reluctantly—broken into a gallop, the boy caught up with the vehicle, and even sprang on board. What else happened we could only guess then; but presently the cart stopped and Charlie's voice hailed us. "It's all right! Come on!"

So we came on; and when we were near enough, we saw that it was really an ideal cart, with an ample tarpaulin cover stretched over hoops, and drawn into a round, mysterious-looking black hole in front.

"I told him he'd simply got to take us in, or we'd think his cart was full of concealed murderers—what?" announced Charlie, breathing fast after his run.

"He" was a man in country clothes, with a town face. That was my first impression of the driver of the cart as I saw him by the light of his own badly

burning lantern; but none of the others seemed to think that there was anything odd about him. Captain O'Malley went on with the explanation that Charlie Brincke had begun, and told the man that he would be well paid for driving us to town, or until we could get some faster, if not better, vehicle.

"I don't want to be churlish, sir, as I tells this young chap here," said the carter, "but I've got a 'eavy load as it is, and there ain't no room for so many folks. As fur my 'avin' anything ter 'ide, why, that's all tommy rot, and you knows it. I'm takin' a cargo of cabbages to Covent Garden market, and I'm full up an' more."

"Well, if you've got too many cabbages there's an easy way to get rid of some of them," replied Captain Lane, "and make room for us."

"We'll pay for any loss you may suffer, of course," finished Teddy O'Malley, anxious not to begin by getting the carter's ill will. "Whatever your cabbages are worth, tell us, and we'll compensate you twice over for those you have to throw out; only be quick about it, and don't keep these ladies standing here. Come, there are three men of us! We'll all lend a hand lightening your cargo. Will a fiver be any use to you?"

"The cabbages ain't my cabbages," grumbled the driver, "and I ain't goin' to 'ave any of 'em pitched out. If you must get in, you must. I won't say no to ladies. But you'll all have to do the best you can, cabbages and all. If you want to pay me something in the end, you can, but them vegetables belong to the man I work for, and I ain't got no right, nor you neither, to chuck any of 'em out."

"All right; we'll get in, then!" said Teddy O'Malley, and Captain Lane, whom Kitty Guest called "Jim."

Jim crawled into the cart first, so as to help us two female things, and the other men lifted us up, so that he could pull us in, while the carter held his horses.

I hadn't said one word, and even if I had wanted to, Kitty wouldn't have given me a chance. But I was thinking

quite a lot; and almost all my thoughts were about the driver of the cart. Of course, I don't know so very much about England yet; but I felt, somehow, that the man wasn't genuine—wasn't what he pretended to be. He didn't seem like the sort of person who would drop his "h's" because he couldn't help it, or who had been born to drive a market cart. I said to myself that he was more like a soldier than a carter, and more like an actor than either; but why should he be playing such an uninteresting part? I took myself to task, saying that, if there were really something queer about the man, the others would be far more likely to notice it than I.

It was an awful scramble getting into the cart; and once we were in it was impossible to sit upright, owing to the low arch of the tarpaulin tunnel. But we all squashed in somehow, with our feet sticking out of the hole in front—that is, all but Charlie, who was obliged to go back—call of duty! Accordingly there were only four of us to go on, not counting the driver, for whom there was no room in his own cart, so he balanced himself gracefully on one of the shafts.

The two men had spread their overcoats for us to sit on, and suggested that Mrs. Guest and I should lie down on the covered-up cabbages to sleep; but we would not have cared to, even if the carter hadn't objected to our going far back, because of a few eggs which he said were there.

I suppose there can be nothing else so dull in the way of scenery all over England as the way between Greenwich and Waterloo Bridge, for which we were making. The slightly countrified bit only lasted a mile or so, and then the road was walled with hideous gray brick houses—silly, flat-faced houses with no expression, just like people are when they have no eyelashes. So you see there was no interesting panorama to talk about, and, naturally, we fell to discussing our own and our neighbors' affairs.

"Are you going to the great show at the Mansion House to-morrow?" Mrs. Guest asked me. "Oh, but of course



We all five set off together walking through the grounds.

you're not. The king has a bad cold, and has gone down to Sandringham to be nursed by the queen. I'd forgotten. He's sending some one to represent him isn't he?"

She didn't say this in a very loud voice; and the horses' big, clumsy feet were making a comfortable "clump, clump" along the road, as they slowly plodded on; yet the carter, who had had the air of being almost asleep, sitting on the shaft, suddenly braced up, as if on an impulse of loyalty, hearing the name of the king. Perhaps he was

surprised that one of his passengers should seem to be associated in her doings with the doings of the King of England.

"After all, he's going to the Mansion House," I said. "It seems everybody was so dreadfully disappointed, and you know the king hates to disappoint his people. The doctors have pronounced him able to go—if he's determined."

"And the queen?" asked Kitty Guest. "Oh, she will go if the king does! It's all rearranged now, to please everyone; and I suppose the change back to

what was originally planned will be in the papers to-morrow. It's Lady Maud's 'wait,' you know, of course, so it doesn't concern me, personally. But I should rather have liked to go. It will be a fine sight at lunch, with all the reconciled Turkish and Austrian dignitaries in their gorgeous dress, and this Turkish prince the Sultan has sent over, who is said to be so handsome that——"

"Haven't you seen him?" inquired Kitty Guest.

"No," I replied. "He came only the day I arrived at Lady Bellington's; and you know he isn't visiting the king. His majesty has lent Dorringtonford House to him and his suite. I haven't heard if Maud will go to the Mansion House or not; but I shall quite envy her if she does. I've never been; and this will be a particularly picturesque occasion."

As I talked I gathered my cloak more tightly round me, for it kept slipping down. Almost it seemed as if some one were pulling it from behind, but I knew that couldn't be. The two men had put Mrs. Guest and me between them on the hard, narrow slip of seat, they taking the outside places; and we were all four crushed tightly together, Teddy O'Malley next to me, Captain Lane next to Kitty Guest. I could see both Teddy's hands, one grasping a rod supporting the tarpaulin, the other holding on to his own knee. Mrs. Guest's hands were clasped round her knees, too; so, you see, I could tell that neither of them had touched my cloak. Still, the twitch came again, for the third and fourth time, so distinctly I couldn't mistake it. Some one or something *had* pulled it.

Quite a creepy feeling came over me; though who ever heard of a market cart being haunted? Without speaking or giving any sign of nervousness, I glanced over my shoulder. Nothing could be seen except a dimly gray-green mound of cabbages—which, by the way, could be smelt as well as seen.

Twitch, twitch, again!

It was all I could do not to jump. But I told myself that there must be a

dog in the cart, or some other little animal—perhaps even a pet monkey. Divided between fright and curiosity I squeezed an arm past Mrs. Guest's shoulder, and began quietly feeling among the cabbages behind me, expecting to touch some small and furry shape.

"If only it doesn't bite!" I thought. But at worst, unless it were a particularly vicious little beast, the mysterious creature couldn't hurt me much, biting through my glove.

Hardly had my fingers begun to glide over the cabbages, when there was a vegetable upheaval, and to my horrified astonishment a human hand grasped mine. In another second I should certainly have screamed, but before I had time to open my mouth after the first shock of surprise the hand had vanished, leaving a bit of paper in mine.

It seemed exactly like something in a dream, and I could not have believed that it had really happened, if it hadn't been for the crisp bit of crumpled paper tucked away in my palm. A last short pressure of the hand that had put it there was evidently an appeal not to lose what had been given; and instinctively I clutched the wad. But for a few moments I could do nothing more. I sat quite dazed and helpless, with the paper in my hand, not knowing what to do. It wasn't long, however, before my brain began to work. I realized that there was a big, a very big mystery hidden in this market cart. What it could be I had not the remotest idea, though all sorts of wild conjectures came crowding into my head. I thought of anarchists, of escaping murderers, of thieves going off with a pile of stolen treasure, of kidnappers, of the victim of some strange crime recovering consciousness and silently appealing to be saved. But though I will confess to you, dear, that I was very frightened and "jumpy," I had no longer any impulse to scream. I didn't want to tell anybody—not even Captain O'Malley—what had happened. I wanted simply to find out for myself; and the quickest way to do this was to open the wad of paper and see what was inside.

Of course it might be a bit of dynamite, enough to blow us all up! But I hadn't much fear of this, as whoever was under the cabbages would be blown up, too.

All the others were chatting as gayly as ever, no doubt supposing that my sudden silence was due to sleepiness. Slowly and unostentatiously I slipped my arm round to the front again, and holding my hand palm upward, opened it with care. The crumpled bit of paper seemed to be a torn envelope. Nothing was inside; therefore something must be written upon it. It was difficult to see how a person concealed under a layer of cabbages could contrive to write a legible word, but it might be possible to do so, inspired by desperation.

Almost as difficult as the writing of such a message would be the reading of it; but I was determined to get to the bottom of the mystery if I snapped my optic nerve in doing so.

When I had fixed my eyes on the paper for several minutes, I made out by the faint yellow gleam thrown up by the lamps of the cart, that something had been roughly scrawled in pencil on the torn half of an envelope—the back half without the address. Then, as I still gazed, words began to take shape before my eyes. I had to hold the paper nearer to them.

"What are you doing, Lady Dalmarre?" asked Captain O'Malley. "Not trying to read in this dim, religious light?"

It might have been dim, but I doubted exceedingly that it was religious!

"Only a memorandum," I answered vaguely.

"I hope it isn't a *billet doux*, under the very nose of your poor old chaperon!" laughed Kitty Guest.

I denied this soft impeachment, and went on puzzling out the penciled words, which were just about as easy to decipher as would have been the tracks of a trained fly. Evidently they had been written blindly in much the same way that people shut their eyes and try to draw a pig; but eventually I made

sense of them—such strange sense that it seemed more absurd than nonsense.

King and queen must not go banquet.

"What could it mean?" I asked myself; and my heart beat fast, for, unless the hidden writer were mad, it must mean something serious.

I tried to send my thoughts back to the beginning of our conversation since we had piled into the cart. What had we talked about? Oh, the lord mayor's banquet to-morrow—or rather to-day! Kitty had said that the king and queen would not be there; and I had replied that the plan was changed; that they were going, after all, rather than cause disappointment. The severe cold from which the king had been suffering was better, and, with his usual courage and unselfishness, he had determined to go through what would be something of an ordeal.

But perhaps I haven't explained to you enough about the banquet. It was to be a kind of "peace banquet," bringing together some very important persons of different countries who had disagreed and been persuaded to agree with each other again.

The only thing clear to me in the mystery of the scrap of paper was, that the person hiding among the cabbages in this market cart had something to do with the banquet at the Mansion House; that having got to know through our conversation that I was connected with the royal household, he evidently desired me to prevent the king and queen from being present; also that he desired me to keep the communication secret.

Of course, he might be a lunatic. This was the first thought that jumped into my head; for who but a lunatic would hide in a cartload of cabbages? Yet instinct bade me distrust the thought, and, recalling my impressions of the driver, I was the more ready to do so.

Why should the cabbage man want the king and queen to be kept away from the Mansion House, was the next question I asked in my own mind. Could it be that the writer was anxious



Hardly had my fingers begun to glide over the cabbages, when there was a vegetable upheaval, and to my horrified astonishment a human hand grasped mine.

to see the war fire in the East rekindled instead of extinguished, and did he dread the benign influence of the English royalties upon men who might hold in their hands the destinies of nations? In any case, how was I to prevent the

king and queen from going to the banquet? I was sure that that would not be possible, no matter how hard I might try to.

"Oh, how hungry I am!" moaned Kitty Guest, as I sat puzzling over the

paper and its meaning. "I'd give anything for something to eat! I could almost eat raw cabbage."

As she spoke she turned her head, and looked round disconsolately at the uninteresting vegetables. "Why!" she exclaimed. "I see something that looks very much like grape fruit!"

We all glanced over our shoulders; and sure enough an upheaval in the cabbage mound—of which I had the explanation—had laid bare a crate of American grape fruit, whose pale golden spheres gleamed temptingly through the slight wooden lattice work.

"What a queer combination, cabbages and grape fruit," remarked Captain O'Malley.

The carter, sitting on the shaft, heard this comment, and half turned round as if to speak, but changed his mind and said nothing.

"Shall we bargain for some of the fruit?" suggested Captain Lane.

"Do!" said Kitty Guest. "It will save us from starvation."

"How much for your grape fruit?" inquired the sailor man.

"Can't sell. Told you the load wasn't mine," replied the driver shortly.

"Well, I suppose your employer is buying to sell," argued Teddy O'Malley. "If we pay you twice the market price for half a dozen grape fruit, and you give him the money, he'll think you a very good man of business, won't he?"

"I don't know what he'd think, but I'm not going to take the responsibility," said the carter.

"What? Not to save the lives of two ladies?" coaxed Mrs. Guest, who is not used to being refused anything by men.

"If I'd know'd I would be teased like this I wouldn't 'ave taken you on board," the fellow growled, dropping as many "h's" as he could. "You can't 'av' the fruit, miss. Sorry; but must do my duty."

"We, too, are sorry, but we must do ours," retorted Captain Lane, "and that is, to provide for the ladies under our charge. Since you won't take the responsibility we will—and the grape

fruit, too. In order to spare your feelings we'll try to do with two—only for the ladies; and you shall have five shillings apiece for them. What do you say to that—eh?"

"I say you shan't touch the fruit!" the man answered sharply. "I tell you I won't see it done."

"Look the other way, then, and you won't see it," laughed Teddy O'Malley.

"Touch that crate, sir, and I'll 'and you over to the first bobby we pass," blurted out the carter. He was not driving now, but the horses plodded on as steadily as ever. Evidently they needed no guidance to find their way along this road.

"The bobby wouldn't have us for a gift," said Teddy. He and Captain Lane were determined to get the fruit now, for their tempers were up, and Teddy had screwed round on the seat with the intention of crawling over the cabbages to the back of the cart where the big crate showed, when to my horror the man on the shaft whipped out a revolver.

"Sit still, or I'll shoot," he said between his teeth. But instead of sitting still, Teddy sprang forward so quickly that the fellow had no time to fire; and in less than a second the big weapon had changed hands.

"Break open the crate, Lane, and get out two grape fruits," said Teddy, as quietly as if the revolver had been a hairpin. "I've got eight bob in change. Can you make up the other two?"

At this instant I felt another twitch at my cloak—very slight but perceptible. I knew what it meant. The hidden one shared the objections of the driver to our having the grape fruit!

Suddenly a very queer thought darted into my brain. "I shouldn't wonder," said I, "if that fruit is meant for the lord mayor's banquet, and I believe it would be better for everybody concerned if it never got there."

The carter glared at me as if he could have bitten off my head, and then I knew that my wild guess had hit the bull's-eye. "I'm sure the grape fruit wouldn't be good for Mrs. Guest," I hurried on, "or for any of us."

"By Jove, Lady Dalmarre, what do you mean?" exclaimed the sailor. But Teddy O'Malley asked no questions. He looked from me to the carter, and from the carter back to me. I suppose the affair at Carmonceux Castle had given him a blind sort of confidence in my powers of deduction, as Sherlock Holmes would say.

"If you and Captain O'Malley would make that man stop the cart before a chemist's shop, and have some of those grape fruit examined, I think that would explain what I mean better than anything else," said I.

Hardly had I got out the words when the carter jumped down from the shaft, and would have been off like an arrow if Captain O'Malley hadn't stopped him with a warning click of his own revolver.

"Stir a step and I'll blow your brains out," he shouted, while Captain Lane leaned over, seized the trailing reins, and stopped the horses. Then down sprang both our men, and the runaway was at their mercy. But no sooner were they out of the cart than something began to happen inside it, which they couldn't see. There was an earthquake among the cabbages, and a man emerged, helping himself up with one hand grasping a support of the awning, and with the other covering Kitty Guest with a revolver so small as to seem a mere baby beside the other. But it was big enough. There was death in it, and I saw by Kitty's face that she realized this. Her lips, open for a cry of warning to our men outside, closed suddenly. She became rigid.

The man bent a dark, young face close to mine. "Remember!" he whispered. "I risked everything to save your king and queen. Help me to save myself!"

Of course I oughtn't to have done what I did, for it was aiding and abetting a criminal. But I just couldn't help it. I suppose being brought up on a ranch made it seem the one thing to do. I caught Mrs. Guest's wrist. "Don't scream. Let him go," I commanded rather than implored. "I'll tell you why afterward."

As he turned to creep toward the back of the cart, and slip out before our men guessed that any one was there except us two women, Kitty could have screamed if she had liked, for she was no longer threatened by the wicked little baby revolver. But she didn't like. My hand on her wrist, squeezing hard, seemed as effective as the weapon. Silent, our hearts beating hard, we watched the slim figure crawl over the cabbages and the crate of fruit; then, stealthy and quick as a lizard, he dropped out of the back of the cart, under the awning. There was no sound of running feet after that, but we knew he was gone; and I, at least, hoped that he would win to safety. Don't be shocked at the sentiment, dear! There was something of good in him, you are bound to admit; for he was willing to risk prison, at the least, rather than the King and Queen of England should come to harm. Perhaps you will think it a cowardly trick of his to run off and leave his mate, but my idea was—and it was justified afterward—that he was compelled to shield others who, if he had been caught, must have been involved.

When the tarpaulin had ceased quivering and he was gone, you ought to have seen the look Mrs. Guest gave me. It was partly angry, partly wondering, partly—yes, really—envious.

"Is it a dynamite plot?" she asked, in a dry little voice. "And are you in it?"

"I don't know yet what kind of a plot it is," I answered in a voice loud enough for Teddy and Captain Lane to hear. "But I *do* know it's a plot; and now I'll tell you all exactly how far I'm 'in' it."

So, then, while Teddy O'Malley hung on to the late driver, and Captain Lane stood by the horses' heads, I began my story, in a roundabout way, coming slowly to the point in order—I'm ashamed to confess—that the man from under the cabbages should have plenty of time to escape. And all the while I was feeling sneakily glad that it would be difficult for Mrs. Guest or me to describe him accurately. If his mate didn't



Hardly had I got out the words when the carter jumped down from the shaft.

choose to give him away, in all probability, I thought, he might go free.

I told how, after we had talked about the Mansion House banquet and I had said that the king and queen were going after all, my cloak had been tweaked, and a paper had been slipped into my hand; "the thing," I explained, which I said was a memorandum. Then I went on to say how puzzled I was at first, but how at last, in the midst of the argument about the grape fruit, I had suddenly put two and two together, and they had made four, in a startling combination. "I was sure I must have hit on the right idea," said I, "when the driver jumped down and tried to run away."

"Jove! but the other man—the man

who wrote!" exclaimed Teddy O'Malley.

"Oh, he *has* run away," I confessed meekly. "He is *quite* gone, and I can't tell you a *bit* what he's like."

With that, much to my surprise, Kitty Guest broke out laughing. "He was rather good-looking, I fancy," said she. "But of course that wasn't the reason we let him go without warning you. It was because the minute you two got out of the cart he threatened us with the most *awful* revolver, and we weren't strong enough to snatch it, as Teddy did the other."

I do think she was a trump, don't you? Her eyes twinkled at me, and I quite loved her. I don't wonder a bit that Captain Lane is frightfully in love

with Mrs. Guest, and I hope she'll marry him some day.

"Yes, we could do nothing except let him go," I added, "but I can't be so *very* sorry if he gets off, for he tried to atone by the warning he gave me. And it might easily have ruined him."

Neither Teddy nor Captain Lane made any comment upon that; but I can't help thinking that they weren't whole-heartedly anxious to track the runaway down. They turned their attention to the carter, and advised him to make a clean breast of the mystery; but he pretended to be stupid, and knew nothing at all about it. If there were a plot, said he, we needn't think *he* was in it. Plots weren't in his line. As for the revolver, about which Teddy questioned him, he always carried one. Traveling by night as he did, it was only a precaution, for there were plenty of queer customers about, and he had had more than one adventure, though none as "silly as this." The only thing for which he blamed himself was taking us on board.

"You wouldn't if we hadn't suggested that we'd think there was something fishy if you refused," said Teddy. "How do you explain the chap hidden under the cabbages?"

"So fur as I know he was only a tramp," answered the carter stoutly. "He asked for a ride because he was dead beat. I didn't look round after I thought he'd gone to sleep, so how was I to see he'd burrowed down under the cabbages? As fur them grape fruit, all I can say is the man I work for put 'em in, and told me I was to take 'em along with the cabbages to the stall where our things is on show in the market. If they were meant for the Mansion House I didn't know it; and I don't believe they was. I bet that chap just wanted his little joke, and then lit out when he saw he might be in for something serious. Perhaps he was an actor out of a job."

All this was more or less plausible, but not quite plausible enough for us.

It was Teddy O'Malley who drove the cart the rest of the way, and the late driver sat between him and Cap-

tain Lane, while Mrs. Guest and I were behind, sitting on the crate of grape fruit, with our men's coats for cushions, as before. There was only a thin layer of cabbages, really, just enough for a blind; but if it hadn't been for the upheaval, when the hidden man moved to write the message, we should never have suspected the existence of the crate. Instead of going to Covent Garden we went to Scotland Yard; because, as Teddy and Captain Lane said, that seemed the right melodramatic thing to do—and no mere police station was grand enough for us. If we had to be mixed up in any queer business—we women—they wished at least to provide a suitable background for us; which was quite nice and thoughtful of them, wasn't it?

When scientifically catechised by the powers that be, the carter lost his nerve, and, as Teddy O'Malley put it, "gave the whole show away."

There *was* a plot—a most horrible plot—and he was only in far enough to help carry it out. Grape fruit really had been ordered for the banquet, it seemed. They were to be served as a first course, half a fruit in each guest's plate, drenched with Maraschino and sugar, and sprinkled with crystallized cherries, American fashion. Being a novelty, it was almost sure that everybody would eat some; and it turned out that each grape fruit had had prussic acid injected into it—enough to kill. Exactly as many grape fruits as there would be guests had been provided, so that none of the servants would dare steal even one; and it wasn't an anarchist plot. It was got up by a band of young Bosnians who were desperate at being annexed by Austria, and furious at the idea of peace instead of war. I don't mean that Bosnia as a country was responsible, but only about a dozen young men, calling themselves "patriots."

A new servant at the Mansion House had been bribed to smuggle in the poisoned grape fruit instead of the good ones which were ordered. The cart which we annexed on the road from Greenwich had been hired; and it was

not really on the way to Covent Garden Market, but was to stop at a certain place where the bribed servant of the Mansion House, and an assistant, were to meet it before dawn. The man in the cabbages was one of the band of "patriots," who intended accompanying the load of grape fruit as far as the rendezvous to make sure that the plan didn't miscarry.

All this didn't come out through the carter, because he didn't know everything; but through another of the "patriots," who was caught by a detective from Scotland Yard at a little hotel near Leicester Square much frequented by rather shady foreigners. He saved himself by betraying his friends; but my patriot they haven't got, so far—and I hope they won't, though I suppose he will never be able to go back to Bosnia, or at least for a very long time.

The wretch who turned traitor said that the other was a "great admirer of the English king and queen."

The grand affair at the Mansion House came off as if nothing had happened; and our royalties were there, although they heard the story of the grape fruit before they went. I dare say you have read in the papers that the banquet was a great success; and so it was. But *how* thankful I am that we talked about it in the market cart!

Your ever loving

PEGGY.

P. S.—I forgot to tell you that some one had gone off with Mrs. Guest's motor, not by mistake, but on purpose. The chauffeur, being very sleepy, didn't know the difference between Mrs. Guest's party and the usurpers, until he reached London, and a strange voice ordered him to stop at a certain hotel.



Confessional

YOUR goodness hath so wrought in me
That it hath purged me of my sin,
Your tears have paid the bitter fee
My waywardness is measured in.

Your patient hands still stay my fall,
Your heart still bears my grief for me,
Your soul is the confessional
Where from my burdens I am free.

They need no thanks of spoken phrase—
Souls who have given as you have given.
The sweetest note of human praise
Soundeth so far and faint in heaven.

So, as one bowed before a shrine,
Whose voice is stilled by choirs above,
My heart makes silent prayer to thine
And trusts that you will know its love.



BUT HALF A MAN

By
Margaret Busbee
Shipp

ILLUSTRATED BY
ARTHUR CRISP

I COULD almost wish that my next patient would be wildly delirious," confessed one nurse to another on the last day of Eldredge's stay at the hospital. "It's a trying thing to nurse a man for months without ever hearing the sound of his voice. His poor, haunted eyes stare at everything and see nothing."

Of his case the nurse knew only what all the world knew; that a few months after the announcement of his engagement, when out driving with his fiancée, he was run into by a touring car; that Miss Lasher had been fatally injured, dying within the hour; and that Doctor Eldredge had been struck so severely upon the head that he had been for months in the hospital. A bad enough disaster in its crude outline, yet one point of pain had obsessed Eldredge's brain to the exclusion of all else. Nina Lasher, the teasing, elusive personality he had pursued through so many years, had somehow escaped him, as she had always declared she would.

"I'm like a clumsy old scientist after a butterfly, stumbling and falling—but I get the butterfly," Eldredge had said grimly one evening.

"That's just what I feel, just what frightens me," she had replied, with a quick intake of breath. "But if in the end you will compel mine, remember that I warned you."

Later came the wonder of her sur-

render, her deepening interest in his lifework. On that last afternoon together, when he had spoken of their happiness, she had answered wistfully:

"I am still afraid of it. The clash of our personalities, which touch and yearn and love but never blend—can't you feel as I do the danger that lies before us?"

Confidently, he had replied: "Yes, there is danger, but it makes the thought of our lives together more wonderful, more enchanting. Soon we shall know!"

The wild car, appearing to leap at them as it came across the private road which bisected the highway, the hoarse, animal screams of its occupants, the shock, the crash, Nina's voice sounding as from a great distance: "Now we shall never know!" the waves which seemed to meet over his head and bear him down, and that smelled warm, as of blood. That moment was still Eldredge's present, even when he was dismissed from the hospital with the command to take a year's rest.

What else? Among his papers were the architect's plans for his hospital and laboratory. His brilliant success in general practice had been to him but the prelude to his life's work. Night studies, laboratory work, trips abroad, bent to one overmastering ambition—to conquer exophthalmic goitre. Nina herself had proposed to put her

fortune into a perfectly equipped hospital, and she was so enthusiastic about it that he sometimes told her that she cared for his work more than she did for him. Already he had achieved an unusual percentage of cures, but he felt that he was on the brink of mastering the mystery of the disease as none of his predecessors had done. Now it was all erased from his brain.

To practice again, when his skill had been powerless to help him save Nina, how futile it seemed! The very thought

merely accepted the change and lived within his lessened means. He gave up his apartment and took a room at a cheap hotel.

A month later Hooper was shocked at the emaciation and despair in his face when he came one day to his office.

"Mind or body about to give out; the only question is which," was Hooper's silent diagnosis.

"I can't stand people," said Eldredge dully, speaking with a painful effort,



"Get off that boy!" he commanded.

of it made him sick, as with the smell of blood.

He went abroad, listless, silent, and returned as he went, purposeless, apathetic, silent. He had been summoned home because of the shrinkage of certain investments. Hooper, his friend and classmate, thought the diminished income might prove an advantage if it roused Eldredge to take up his practice again, though of course his old patients had fallen away. But Eldredge

most piteous to those who remembered his old quick, positive speech. "Get me away, Hooper, get me away."

He appealed like a helpless child. Hooper picked up an atlas and examined it intently. Then he put his finger on the most out-of-the-way spot on the map. The Thanksgiving house party he mentally declined, as with an air of long determination he said:

"All my life I've been crazy to go to Hatteras, the most famous point on

the Atlantic coast. I know a fellow who has been down there, and says it's the finest place in the country for a sportsman. Says he boarded with a fisherman and lived the simple life with a vengeance. Got so wild and shy that if he met another man he'd run like a deer. You know there is a line of outlying sandbars all along the North Carolina coast, with the Sound on one side of them and the Atlantic on the other. I rather fancy it would be nice to see the ocean minus side-show attachments. I've forgotten how it looks without boardwalks, moving-picture shows, and Hungarian bands. Shall we go?"

Eldredge nodded assent. As he went out of the door, his step was slow and faltering like an old man's, his tallness lessened by the stooped shoulders and bent head.

"Poor chap! Nobody entirely gets over a bad blow on the cranium. He is only half alive. It would have been better if he had died, poor old chap!"

Later on he went to Eldredge's hotel and helped him pack his grips.

"Of course you are to take your gun," he said.

"I can't stand it!"

Eldredge sat up in bed, then he got up abruptly, lit the lamp, and began to dress. Hooper, tired out after a day in the cold wind, lying in a battery shooting brant, turned over in bed and looked with astonishment at his friend.

It was the first time that day he had spoken, almost the first time since they had left New York. Through the thin partition the confused noises in the next room were as audible as though the boards did not exist. The bubbling groans of a man and the sobbing of a girl ran as an undertone to the excited sentences of one or two other people.

"Unclinch his hands! Don't let him swallow his tongue! Hold him, Odessa!"

"Are you going in there?" asked Hooper, as Eldredge was leaving the room.

He had already gone. Hooper sat up in bed and listened. Then he

smiled to himself as the joy of Eldredge's interest in anything dawned upon him.

The room was in wild confusion. A boy of nineteen or twenty lay on a bed in the foaming stupor of a fit, and a girl with the terror of despair sat on his chest, sobbing hysterically and trying to prize open his mouth with a fork.

Eldredge bumped into Mrs. Fulcher, who carried a bucket of hot water, as they both tried to pass the door at the same time. His natural courtesy was forgotten, he was not even conscious of her.

"Get off that boy!" he commanded, as he entered, and Odessa suspiciously withdrew to the foot of the bed.

Eldredge was instantly the doctor; all the suppressed and crushed instincts of his nature rose up, his brain reeled for an instant and then resumed its balance, as he took charge of the situation with the professional certainty of long practice.

Slowly a look of consciousness came into the glassy eyes, and when the boy at length sat up, Eldredge sank into a chair, trembling violently, a cold sweat standing on his forehead.

"Ain't you a doctor?" asked the girl, her eyes still brimming with tears.

Eldredge looked at her for some seconds in silence. Then, with hesitating difficulty, he answered: "I was once."

Mrs. Fulcher was noisy in her gratitude, but Mr. Fulcher, who had stayed unnoticed in the room through it all, had watched with grim certainty the outcome.

"I knew Alaska warn't goin' to die," he said. "He'll live to eat the goose that eats the grass on all our graves, I'll bet ye."

When Eldredge and Hooper entered the cookroom for breakfast early the next morning, the meal was already on the table. The battered crockery held a strange assortment for breakfast, stewed tomatoes, rice, sweet potatoes, soda biscuit, and fried ham, but at Eldredge's plate, on a gilt china tray, were two poached eggs.



In five minutes she was clear of the ice houses.

"Humph!" said Hooper. "Eldredge, you seem to be favored."

As both men glanced up, they saw Odessa's dewy, grateful eyes fastened upon the physician.

Mrs. Fulcher burst violently into the room. She was big with the excitement of startling news.

"Doctor, for God's sake go to him! Bill Brunsey has most shot his hand off. He was pushing his boat off with his gun when it fired. Lord, I do pity his wife, and them eleven little children! You know you are a doctor, after the way you helped my poor boy. Alaska is Odessa's twin, her twin brother. You shan't lose your day's hunt; I'll make my old man row you out to the battery in the skiff; you won't lose more than two hours."

Seeing Eldredge rise from his chair, and knowing her point was gained, Mrs. Fulcher rushed out to be the first to spread the news that the "dummy was a doctor."

When Eldredge, following Odessa, had left the room, Hooper slapped his

leg so violently and smiled so broadly that one would have thought the occurrence a humorous one. But he ate the eggs.

A damper fell upon Hooper's satisfaction the following day. Mrs. Fulcher's news brought many to see the doctor, some from need and some from curiosity. Hooper, standing near, was delighted to see how much his manner resembled the old busy one of the clinic. One man had brought his young daughter, asking for something "to rub on her neck for a little swelling."

Mechanically, Eldredge asked questions, made tests of her sight and the action of her heart; the only thing that was real was the pain in the back of his head, as if a blow had struck suddenly—and the smell of blood. He drew the father aside.

"Your daughter has exophthalmic goitre." His tongue thickened until he could hardly pronounce the word. "I cannot treat it. I cannot advise you. I—I know nothing of this disease. But I will send her to the place where the

best results have been obtained so far"—as in a mirage he saw again the plans of his own hospital and his dream of the great work it was to mean for humanity—"and I will pay for her journey and her treatment."

With a hesitating, uncertain step, his shoulders stooped, Eldredge went into his room and locked the door. Hooper swore to himself quite softly. He tried to prevail on his friend to go out hunting, but he met with a weary refusal.

At dusk came a "Banker" not so easily put aside. His "woman was took bad, and the doctor must come.

"She's had six chilluns befo', but she ain't never been took bad till now. She ain't never had nobody with her but ma; mostly ma's a better hand at handlin' babies than doctors be, but somehow Emmyline's mighty sick this time."

In a rowboat they threaded in and out along the shoals of the Sound, until eight miles upshore their journey ended at a desolate habitation in an empty land.

Eldredge followed into one of the two rooms of the cabin, where a woman lay, dully moaning, while a child barely able to walk fretted by the side of the bed, and two others were sleeping on a pallet in the corner. Yet, in spite of the unfamiliar and sordid surroundings, how familiar and natural it seemed to be again one with the mystery of birth, and fighting against the mystery of death! He was unconscious of physical fatigue, unconscious of his chilled frame, as he measured the strength of the mother's taut, sinewy body against the invader. No note of a skylark could have sounded so sweet to his ears as the first quivering whimper of a living child. It was a comically ugly baby, but Eldredge was unaware of it, or of the ring of triumph in his voice as he announced it was "a fine boy."

On his return, Hooper met him with a distressed face. His outing was cut short by a wireless message transferred to Hatteras from the Cape Point station, calling him back to New York. He looked at Eldredge in blank aston-

ishment, and doubted his hearing when Eldredge said:

"I am not going back. I can't leave that sick woman."

But he thanked God from the bottom of his heart, for he knew that his friend was saved; that the passion of his life was stronger than the passion of his love, that he had passed through the pangs of rebirth, and a man was born again.

It was early spring at Cape Hatteras.

The forest of pine and palm, live oak and laurel, was glorified with masses of snow and gold—the snow of dogwood blossoms and the perfumed gold of yellow jessamine. Hooper, who had recently sent the book to Eldredge, recalled Captain Barlowe's letter, the first written by an Englishman in America:

Where we smelled so sweet and so strong a smell as if we had been in the midst of some delicate garden abounding with all kinds of odoriferous flowers, by which we were assured that the land could not be far distant.

The little mail boat touched at the cape, and then puffed and panted on its way downshore to the town of Hatteras. Hooper strained his near-sighted eyes, as Tine Ballance threw a rope to the dock and a landing was effected.

"What! Don't you know me?" said a tall man, bronzed with the tan of wind and sun.

Eldredge wrung his friend's hands as he talked rapidly. "I am practicing medicine, old man, from Kinnakeet to Ocracoke, for fifty miles up and down these banks"—his voice choked—"and it's God's country, Hooper, it's God's country!"

"This is fine," said Hooper, looking away. "The soft salt air is like velvet to the lungs of a poor frozen man from New York. Where do you live, Eldredge? Let's walk, and send back for the grips."

"I still board with the Fulchers, of course."

The afterglow of the sunset clothed Hatteras in fugitive, magical beauty;

rising from the Diamond Shoals and sinking to rest in the waters of Pamlico Sound, the sun rose and set in the water. Voices of mocking birds thrilled and palpitated from the scrubby live oaks behind which the houses nestled. Sheep and cattle had left the woods for the beach, which was clothed afresh in tender green. Like a deep organ tone pervading all, was the solemn bass of the sea.

"Here where the world is quiet,
Here where all trouble seems
Spent winds and dead waves riot,
In doubtful dream of dreams."

Hooper began to quote, and then broke off indignantly. "Why are you looking amused? Is a man never permitted to feel poetical because he happens to be plump?"

After supper, Eldredge and his friend walked over to the beach, a short half mile away. The waves broke in long lines of burnished silver in the moonlight, the soft spring air was a caress.

Suddenly Hooper broke the silence.

"Eldredge, that girl is in love with you."

Eldredge started in amazement. "I think not," was all he said, but his voice held a doubt.

"I know it," said the other.

Odessa Fulcher was not a girl to whom a man could be indifferent. Alaska, her twin brother, had been the weaker from birth, and consequently the brother and sister seemed to have exchanged parts. There was no better boatman on the banks than Odessa. She could fish a pound net or help to haul a seine, shoot a gun or run a gas engine. Lithe, strong, graceful with the muscle to handle herself with the least effort, she was beautiful with perfect health and absolute unconsciousness. A stranger, seeing her playing quoits with the boys, could never have mistaken her camaraderie for forwardness. She was

too pure to be conscious and too healthy to be abashed.

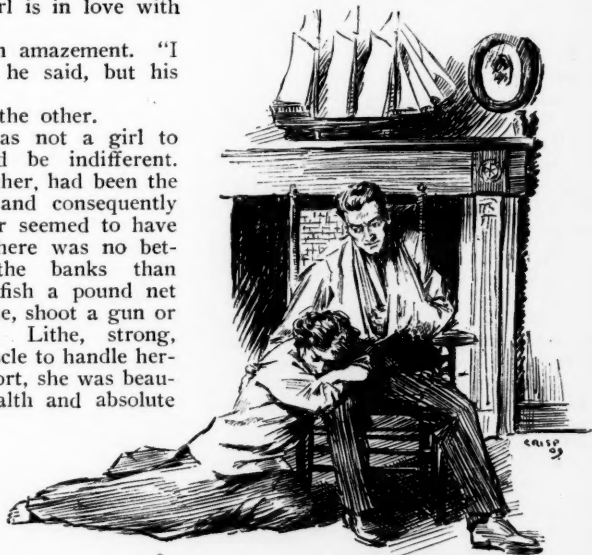
Old man Haskins came up the road on his way to the store, leaned over the Fulchers' fence, and called to Odessa, who was cleaning fish for supper.

"Odessa, had ye heard about the doctor? He's hurt pretty bad down to Ocracoke, and they are skeered he'll die."

The knife stopped in midair for a second, then fell from her hand. From the pallor that blotted out the youthful color of her face, it seemed as if it had been plunged into her heart.

"There was some trouble with the gas engine," called back Haskins, as he moved along up the road.

Odessa's mind was already made up. She ran out of the gate and down the quaggy path across the marsh to the landing. The gasoline launch's tank was empty—she knew if she sought her father to ask for gasoline, he would not let her go. But there lay her sailboat, and the wind was fair.



She sank on her knees by his side and began to sob.

In five minutes she was clear of the ice houses that stood in deep water for the fish schooners, and scudding before the wind like a frightened gull. The inlet was yet to cross, and as the little boat began to "fly," her excitement reached a point of frenzy.

Barefooted, bareheaded, drenched with salt water, without knocking at the door, Odessa stood before the astonished Eldredge. He was pale from the loss of blood, his arm bandaged in his gory shirt.

She sank on her knees by his side and began to sob.

"Little girl," said Eldredge, "I am not much hurt, but little Willie Haslins saw me laid out, covered with blood, and rushed off with the idea that I was dying. But how did you get here, child?"

She tried to tell him, through sobbing breaths.

Nothing is better, I well think,
Than love. The hidden well water
Is not so delicate to drink.

Eldredge would never again have tried to seek "the hidden well water" as for long years he had sought it; but this love was as a crystal goblet held to his lips by innocent hands that joyed in giving.

And with a sudden, wonderful gladness he realized that the draught was sweet, and that his lips were parched.

Hooper comes down every year. He and Odessa are fast friends, and Eldredge's boys confuse him with Santa Claus, partly because of his increasing rotundity, and partly because of the wonderful toys he brings. But for the most part, that sturdy, barefooted trio prefer to play in the shallower parts of the Sound with a fleet of their own manufacture, or to go in the surf with their father, like a school of sportive porpoise.

Hooper's visit, and the packing cases full of books, are Eldredge's only touch with the outside world.

Once Hooper burst into long pent-up speech:

"It's a crime for you to bury your life in these sand hills. Your strength and vigor have returned, you have more endurance than any man I know. If you achieve such results in your scattered practice here, think what you could accomplish in the city again, with every assistance of science and service. This is but half a life!"

"And I," said Eldredge gravely, "am but half a man. In the city, the silence which once held me would engulf me again. New York to me is the far-off necropolis where people are passing over the ruins of my hospital and the grave of my youth. I was dead—for he who is without hope is dead—and my work here and Odessa's love have made me alive again. I have found myself, among these people who need and trust me—and Odessa is happier here."

His earnestness melted into a smile, as his youngest came into the yard dragging a huge drum for so small a boy to land, and his wife came on the porch to enjoy the boy's exultation.

She was a pretty picture with her laughing eyes and lips, her strength and grace of movement, and that indefinable expression which has its being in deep springs of content and love. Eldredge drew her to him.

"Odessa, Hooper is preaching the city to us. Shall we go?"

Her dismayed look cleared as she read the negation in her husband's face.

Looking over the barricade of his encircling arms, she turned to Hooper with friendly defiance.

"Why should we go? We are the happiest people in the world!"



The Mystery of the Timber Tract.

By Francis Metcalfe.



ILLUSTRATED BY CH. GRUNWALD

THIS story is set down as Johnson told it to me one night when we had foregathered in a dak bungalow on the far side of the world, as nearly in his own words as I can recollect them. I shall preface it only by the statement that Johnson is an unimaginative man, a keen observer, and not given to romancing. He is the eyes and ears of capitalists in many large enterprises; sent by them to report upon properties which are submitted as possible investments, and his hard common sense and absolute integrity make his reports more valued than those of many technical experts. I may add, further, that I know the region where the events which he tells of took place, and I am acquainted with many of the surviving characters. Johnson was unaware of this; but I recognized them from his description of their peculiar manner of speech and mode of life, as will any reader who has visited this isolated community where clan loyalty and traditions are stronger than the statute law.

"My business takes me to all parts of the world, and I have many curious

experiences which are not mentioned in the official reports to my employers," he remarked after he had sealed a fat envelope and addressed it to a man whose name in New York is synonymous with millions. "I am sent to get the rock-bottom facts about properties which may be too glowingly described by enthusiastic promoters; but the men who employ me care only for such information as deals with dollars and cents, and I have never been employed to solve a psychological problem. I incidentally ran across one, however, the last time I was employed by the man who sent me out here; and I'll tell you the facts and let you draw your own conclusions."

The native "boy" brought us tepid beer, and Johnson lighted a long, black Burmese cheroot and settled himself comfortably in the rattan lounge chair.

"About five years ago I was asked to report upon a large tract of timber land in—well, within easy distance of New York," he continued. "It had escaped the axe because a special and expensive line of railway would be necessary to develop it; but the tremen-

dous advance in the price of lumber brought it to notice as a possibly profitable investment. I was instructed to go over it thoroughly, estimate the amount of standing timber, and see if there was sufficient water power to operate sawmills. Knowing that it would be a tremendous task to get over twenty thousand acres of primeval forest by dipping into it from its borders, I took along my camp outfit, intending to live in the woods.

"The livery-stable proprietor in the nearest village on the railroad arranged to drive the rig which I hired to carry me and my belongings to the property; but when I told him that I wished to be taken as far as possible into the tract, and that he would probably have to remain overnight, he declared that he could not accompany me. Two or three of the loafers who make a country livery stable their lounging place also refused the job on various pretexts, and he finally had to put the team in charge of a stolid-looking Swede, a new arrival in the country, who understood only about ten words of English.

"Jake don't know none too much about this part of the country; but you can't lose your way, an' he ain't none afeerd of ghosts," he said as I climbed in. 'Jest keep a-turnin' to the right at every fork of the roads, an' about fifteen miles up you'll come to Jerry's cabin. It's built of logs an' stands on the right-hand side. That's jest at the edge of the woods, an' mebbe he'll guide you in.'

"I couldn't figure out what a fear of ghosts had to do with the proposition; but, knowing the tendency of villagers on the edge of wild territory to have fun with city dwellers, I only nodded my head in reply as we drove off.

"Jake's limited vocabulary made it impossible to get enlightenment from him, and save for the queer guttural sounds which he made to encourage the horses on a road which was not fit for a goat to clamber over our journey was a silent one; but I had come from an unusually long spell of desk work and I found compensation in the fresh,

crisp air and the beauty of the brilliant forest coloring. It was almost a steady climb through a wild country, and we passed less than a dozen houses before pulling up in front of Jerry's, where we were welcomed by a pack of yelping mongrel hounds, and as it was already growing dusk I determined to ask for a night's lodging.

"Jerry himself proved to be a typical mountaineer, such a type as one would expect to find in the Blue Ridge; tall and thin, but apparently all bone and sinew. A bad figure of a man to have a mix-up with, and evidently, in spite of his courteous but laconic greeting, suspicious of strangers.

"The cabin was comfortable enough and scrupulously clean, and after that drive I was hungry enough to have eaten the horses which drew me; but the supper left nothing to be desired. The mutton tasted suspiciously like venison and the alleged chicken had the flavor of partridge, while a rack of rifles and shotguns over the fireplace strengthened my suspicions that the meat came from neither sheepfold nor hencoop.

"There was little conversation during the meal; Jerry was taciturn by nature, and his wife and children were overcome by shyness; but he rather reluctantly admitted that the shooting was good and that in the season he occasionally killed a deer. I made up my mind that he took me for a State game warden, and frankly stated my errand.

"Can you act as guide for me for the next week?" I asked after I had explained things. 'I intend to make a thorough inspection of the property, and it would be a great help to have some one who is familiar with the lay of the land.'

"He refused a very liberal offer of compensation almost curtly.

"This yere is a wild country, it is," he said, shaking his head. 'We as lives into it likes to get home nights to our families, we do, an' I don't reckon as how you'll find any one who'll lie out nights with you. Some of the boys'll likely be here to-night, an' you can ask 'em yourself, you can.'

"This was the longest speech I had heard from Jerry in our brief acquaintance, and it had to content me until the arrival of 'the boys.'

"Great, strapping mountaineers they were, and unless it was to look me over I could hardly see the object of their coming; for there was nothing of sociability in the call. They all bore a certain family resemblance to Jerry and possessed the same habit of taciturnity; for after a curt 'Evenin',' on arrival each took a seat on the fence and silently whittled a pine stick. The pile of shavings which littered the roadside indicated that this was a favorite meeting place, and they were so absorbed in their occupation that it was impossible to keep up a sustained conversation.

"This yere stranger wants a guide for a week in the Langthorn tract, he does,' remarked Jerry after his keen knife had reduced a large pine stick to splinters. 'Be any of you boys hankerin' fer the job?'

"Three-fifty a day and all found,' I added quickly; but there was no response and no interruption of the whittling.

"Jerry glanced at me and shook his head; my face must have expressed my disappointment, for he volunteered to act as my guide by day, stipulating only that he should leave me in time to reach home by nightfall. The others glanced at me curiously and, I thought, with disapproval when I announced that in that case I should carry a light shelter tent and camp alone, exploring in the immediate vicinity after he left and before he rejoined me in the mornings. Wilderness dwellers are, as a rule, men of few words; but with innate courtesy each of them clumsily expressed regret that the timidity of the women folks stood in the way of my wishes.

"On the opposite side of the road, between us and the forest, was a narrow cleared space, and in the bright moonlight the stumps and underbrush could be plainly distinguished. The nondescript collection of dogs owned by the different men was nosing about in the brush, and suddenly one of them gave tongue and was joined by all the others, yapping and barking on the trail of some animal. It excited a languid interest in the crowd for a few minutes,



"Be any of you boys hankerin' fer the job?"

just so long as the hounds circled about; but when they settled on a straight line which led to the forest the shower of shavings again commenced to fall.

"I was surprised at their indifference, for the yelping pack seemed to be getting down to business; but the dogs had no sooner disappeared in the woods than their yapping changed to howls of fear, and they came slinking back across the clearing, the hair on their back erect and their tails between their legs. They seemed to want the protection of human companionship; but their owners paid little attention to them and looked at each other furtively when I suggested that the curs had found more than they bargained for.

"Jerry volunteered the information that 'There's b'ars an' sich trash in them woods, there be,' and the arrival of another man interrupted further surmise as to the reason of their strange behavior.

"The newcomer resembled the others in build and costume, but in the bright moonlight he appeared to be a much older man; for the long hair which fell to his shoulders from under the soft felt hat was as white as snow. He carried a double-barreled shotgun and was followed by a good-looking hound, and I noticed that the others did not raise their eyes to his as they responded to his 'Evenin', boys.'

"'Has any of you seen Lon?' he asked, peering anxiously from one to the other, and each in turn shook his head and appeared uncomfortable under the searching gaze. The old man gave an exclamation of disappointment and looked hopelessly toward the woods.

"'I reckon I'd better be steppin' along, then, I had,' he said slowly. 'I must sure find Lon to-night, fer Jinny's gettin' powerful oneasy about him.'

"The eternal whittling went on without interruption and no one said anything as he turned and walked toward the forest; but he had no sooner entered its shadows than the melancholy howl of a dog in fear came to our ears and the hound which had followed him came slinking back as the others had

done, crawling on its belly to Jerry's feet. He reached down and petted it, and the other men, as if the return of the hound were a signal, closed their jackknives and, with a short 'Night, Jerry,' 'Night, Mr. Johnson,' departed for their respective homes.

"I followed Jerry to the house, where he tied the hound to a pillar of the porch, although his own half-dozen mongrels were left at liberty.

"'There seems to be one man in this community who is able to be away from home at night,' I said. 'Is Lon his boy?'

"'Lon is dead these five years, he is, Mr. Johnson,' answered Jerry, looking at me gravely. 'Him an' poor Joe, there, was cousins, they was, an' Joe hasn't been quite right in his head since Lon died. Every night in the year he searches the woods fer him, he does. I tell you this because you might run across him in the woods an' harm him. We are pretty much all kin up here an' they was both my cousins, too.'

"This last statement seemed to be a hint to me to cease intruding upon a purely family affair; so I took the tallow dip which he gave me and went to my room.

"I don't think that I am unduly imaginative, and usually only physical discomfort will cause me to lie awake o' nights; but the thought of that poor old white-haired mountaineer searching the lonesome woods for a man who had been mouldering in his grave for five years got on my nerves, and I couldn't sleep. I finally dozed off, and it seemed to me that I had hardly closed my eyes when I was awakened by the joyful barking of the hound. I tumbled into my clothes and went out, just as the day was breaking, and in the gray dawn I saw the night wanderer coming slowly across the clearing.

"'I can't find any trace of Lon, I can't,' he complained wearily as he came up to where Jerry was untying the hound. 'All night long I've looked, I have, an' I've no news to carry back to Jinny. It's cold in the snow, too, it is; but you boys'll look fer him to-day, won't you, Jerry?'

"Yes, Joe, we'll look, we will; but you'd better stop an' have a cup of coffee," answered Jerry pleasantly.

"No, thankin' you kindly; I must be steppin' back to Jinny, I must," he replied wistfully and turned away, the hound jumping at him and whimpering its welcome. In the daylight I saw that his face belied his hair, and although it was seamed and weather-beaten it was that of a young man.

"Twenty-eight, he is," said Jerry laconically when I spoke of it; and as he was evidently unwilling to volunteer further information I refrained from asking questions.

"I found Jerry a capital woodsman and an ideal guide. The tract had been spared by the fires which do so much damage in timber lands, and the trees were in fine condition. Game was as plentiful as in a carefully guarded preserve; partridges and woodcock whirled from the bushes as we passed, and the banks of the streams were cut up by the tracks of many deer which had come for water during the night. When Jerry discovered that I was no novice in the woods he became more communicative, telling me where the largest trout were to be caught and pointing out the swamps where the deer lay during the day; but the burden of his conversation was the repeated assertion that I could accomplish my task most easily by sleeping at his house and carrying a luncheon with me on my daily excursions. He was so insistent that I finally concluded to spend at least one more night there, and I found the second evening a repetition of the first.

"The same crowd of men gathered on the fence in the moonlight, the dogs acted in the same way as the night before, Joe appeared at the whistling bee at the same time and after an almost identical conversation disappeared in the forest; while his hound's return to Jerry was the signal for the dispersal of the party. It was so exactly like the night before that it seemed like the second performance of a carefully rehearsed play and, although I could see no reason for an attempt to hoodwink me, I went to my room with the

suspicion that it was all arranged for my special benefit. Again I lay awake thinking of the poor lunatic on his hopeless quest and the weirdness of his night wandering in the forest; but the memory of the moonlight suggested a solution of the mystery.

"Moonlight!—Moonshine!" I exclaimed, sitting up in bed, and I laughed as I lay down again at the thought of the elaborate plan which the apparently guileless mountaineers had prepared to keep me out of the woods at night that their illicit still might not be intruded upon. Having explained things to my own satisfaction, I slept soundly, and when I was awakened by the hound in the morning I did not go out; but watched through a hole in the shutters. Joe came from the woods as before and after the same exchange of words with Jerry disappeared up the road with his hound, and I mentally complimented the gang on its attention to detail; but determined that I should get to the bottom of the thing.

"Although Jerry's disapproval was evident, he wasted few of his precious words in trying to dissuade me when I insisted upon carrying my small tent and cooking outfit with me that morning. He was more reticent during the day, and we were a good eight miles from his cabin when he left me to my own devices. I went about my camp preparations methodically, cut a good supply of wood, and pitched my tent near a small stream from which ten minutes' fishing gave me the trout for my supper. I determined to do a little exploring on my own account; but I was not hopeful of finding anything; for Jerry had readily acquiesced in my choice of a camping place, while he had persistently led me away from the southern part of the tract where I concluded the still was located.

"My investigations were fruitless; there was not the slightest suspicion of smoke in the clear sharp air to suggest a fire under a retort; and, somehow, the impression that I was not alone, that I was under observation from the dark shadows as I walked through the woods, gave me an uncon-



Paying absolutely no attention to me as he warmed his hands at the blaze.

fortable feeling, and I soon returned to my tent.

"I like human companionship; but I am always glad to be alone in the woods, especially at night. It is a relief to change the hum of the city for the night sounds of the forest, and under their influence my eyes are usually shut fast in dreamless sleep as soon as I draw the blankets to my chin; but slumber did not come readily that first

night in the Langthorn tract. I heard only the familiar noises; the croaking of frogs, the humming of insects, the chirping of the tree toads, and the rasping of the katydids; but, nevertheless, I felt that I was not alone; that from the deep thicket about the camp eyes which belonged to no forest creature were watching my tent.

"But a long day in the open air and miles of tramping through thick woods

had brought a fatigue which was not to be denied, and at last I slept, to awaken as the sun was rising. I tried to roll over for another nap; but the desire to see if a vivid dream which had come to me the night before had foundation in fact was irresistible, and I poked my head out of the tent.

"In my dream I was camping in the woods and had been awakened by a shout, followed by the report of a gun and a scream of pain. I dreamed that the ground was covered so deep with snow that I was unable to leave the camp to investigate, and the rest of it was only a confused memory. But the first part was so vivid that I was much relieved to find that in reality the grass was still green, that the autumn leaves were slowly falling as the branches swayed in the dawn breeze, and a faint blue spiral of smoke was rising from the embers of my camp fire.

"The dream had slipped from my mind by the time I had caught the trout for my breakfast, made my coffee, and packed up the camp outfit; but the impression that I had been followed and watched during the night was still strong, and when Jerry joined me I asked him if any of the boys had been in the woods.

"No one was into 'em but Joe, there wasn't," he replied uneasily, and I noticed that his eyes avoided mine. "He generally keeps more to the south, he does, an' I don't reckon as how he was into this part last night, fer I ain't seen not none of his tracks."

"He looked with disapproval at the packed outfit, and I knew that he had counted upon my making my headquarters at this ideal camping spot.

"We had harder work that day, for I was inspecting the swamp timber and we were for many hours up to our knees in mire and water. When we finally got on firm ground I selected the first likely spot I came across to pitch my tent. Jerry raised all sorts of objections to it—the brook near by did not contain as good trout as one he could show me a couple of miles farther on; it was so near the swamp that mosquitoes would bother me, and

that part of the tract was considered unwholesome and a breeder of 'break-bone fever,' and so on; but I was obdurate, and he finally gave in and cut the poles for my tent. His opposition convinced me that I was getting 'warm' and after I had resisted his final appeal to move he looked at me doubtfully and spoke slowly, as if the delivery of each word hurt him.

"This yere ain't reckoned a healthy place, Mr. Johnson, it ain't; but I guess you can take care of yourself. All sorts of trash comes from the swamp at night, there does, an' I don't reckon as how you'll have pleasant dreams yere. I know you wouldn't go fer to hurt poor Joe; but he might come blunderin' in yere at night an' startle you, he might. Won't you be keeferful an' if you hear him jest keep in your bed, an' he won't bother you not none at all, he won't."

"I laughed at the idea of being frightened and assured him that I should be careful; but Jerry shook his head doubtfully, and I knew that he left me regretfully, and that his mind was filled with misgiving as he started for home.

"After supper I stretched out in front of the fire waiting for the moon to rise, and I suppose the fatigue of the day asserted itself; for I dozed off. When I awakened I rubbed my eyes in astonishment; for, although it was only early autumn, the ground was covered with a deep layer of snow. The summer noises of the forest which had lulled me to sleep were stilled; but I could hear the wind in the leafless branches, and on the opposite side of the fire, paying absolutely no attention to me as he warmed his hands at the blaze, stood a man whom I had never seen before.

"In build he was of the mountaineer type; but his clothes were not those of a woodsman. He seemed spurious, if you can understand what I mean; a backwoodsman trying to masquerade in the attire of civilization; and the result was not pleasing, although his face was handsome after the coarse, animal type. Instead of the usual ragged beard of the mountaineer he wore only a mus-

tache which he had attempted to curl at the ends. His expression was unpleasant; a nasty leer trying to conceal a craven fear which his shifty, restless eyes and listening attitude betrayed; such an expression as I have seen upon the faces of criminals arraigned before the bar for sentence. His lips were moving, but no sound came from them, and when I spoke to him I realized that my own voice was unnatural. He paid no attention to my greeting, and the longer I looked at him the more unreal he seemed; for his face was colorless with the pallor of death and his eyes looked straight at me, apparently without seeing me. Suddenly the sound for which he had been listening came to his ears, and I, too, heard it; a faint hail of 'Lon, ohé, Lon!' which came from the north, and with a movement of his lips which I knew indicated a curse, although no sound came from them, he turned and fled into the woods.

"I seemed incapable of moving; but as the sound of the calling came nearer I watched for the appearance of Joe; for Joe I knew it must be. In a few minutes he came wading through the snow, guided by the firelight; but it was not the Joe whom I had seen at Jerry's cabin. His hair was as black as jet, his figure erect, and his eyes were flashing; while the hound which had refused to enter the forest with him was close at his heels. He paid no attention to me as he came up to the fire; but when he saw the stranger's footprints in the snow he took up the line of flight like a hound on a fresh scent and disappeared among the trees. Still I could not move; but when a few minutes later I heard a shout, the report of a gun, and a scream of pain—just as I had heard them in my dream the night before—I struggled to my feet and tried to follow; but I tripped and fell headlong. I was conscious that I had hurt my arm in the fall, and when I rolled over and sat up I could hardly believe my eyes.

"It was broad daylight, there was no snow on the ground, and the trees still retained their autumn foliage! My fire had burned out, my right arm was

asleep from lying on it, and I was chilled to the bone; but it was not entirely the cold which made me shiver as I cursed my carelessness for having gone to sleep in that way; and so vivid was the impression of my dream that I could hardly convince myself it was not midwinter as I stamped and swung my arms to restore my circulation.

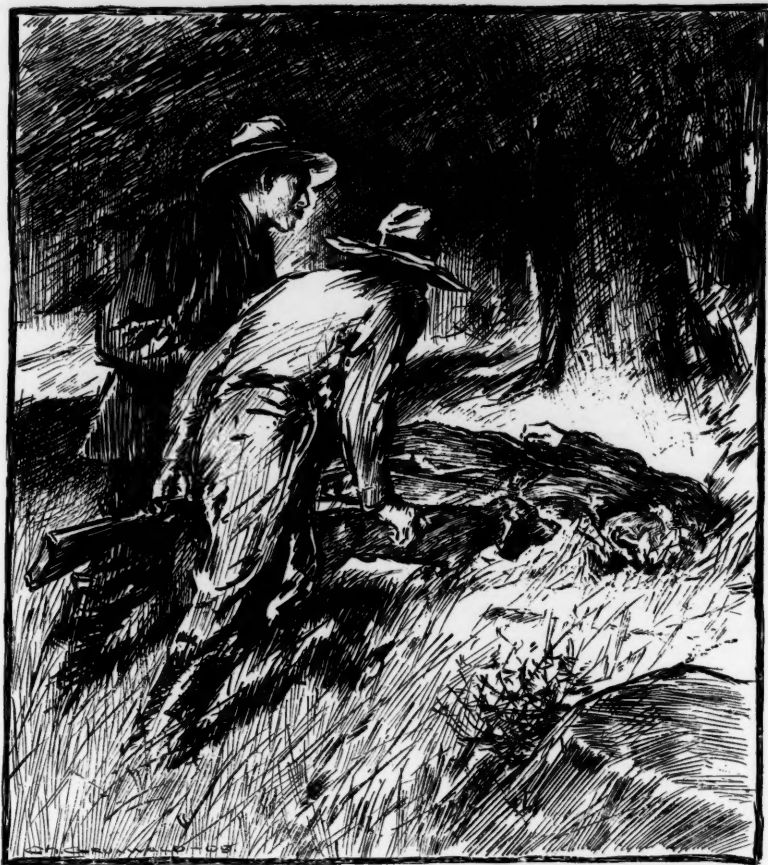
"I suppose that I appeared a bit seedy when Jerry came, for he looked at me curiously; but I explained it by telling him that I had fallen asleep in the open and got chilled. He seemed surprised when I told him that I should spend another night in the same camp; but uncanny dreams in the woods were a new sensation for me, and I determined to fight it out to see if the locality induced them.

"He left me before I reached camp that evening, and after I had made things snug for the night I waited for the moon to rise; but I took no chance of spending the night without shelter, and stretched out under the tent.

"Again I dozed off, and again I awakened to find the ground covered with snow and the same stranger in front of my fire. Only his demeanor was different; for while he listened as anxiously for any sound from the woods there was an expression of triumph on his face as he circled around the fire and looked up at the sky. I watched him closely, and when his body came between me and the fire I gave a start of horror; for in the left side of his chest, in the place where his heart should have been, there was a hole which I could have put my fist in! It extended clean through the chest, and through it I could see the firelight as plainly as I can see your face!

"I felt that each separate hair on my head was rising and that a strip of ice was replacing my backbone; for no man could be alive with an injury like that, and I could not take my eyes from him as he moved to the other side of the fire; but suddenly it seemed as if a ton of dynamite had exploded close to me, and I found myself sitting bolt upright, staring through the end of the tent at the figure before me. The

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We found Joe—lying under a great oak at the edge of a small clearing.

whole scene had changed, the snow had disappeared, and rain was falling in torrents, while lightning zigzagged across the sky and the peals of thunder seemed to rip the forest to pieces.

"An audible cry of relief came from the lips of my spectral visitor and then he gradually faded away.

"I think that I must have fainted from sheer terror; but I was quickly revived by the thorough soaking which I received, for there was no illusion about the thunderstorm. Daylight

found me a drenched and uncomfortable mortal and thoroughly upset by the vision; for I could no longer call it a dream. Jerry was heartily welcome when he arrived soon after daybreak, holding in leash Joe's hound, which was barking excitedly.

"Have you seen anything of Joe?" he asked anxiously, and I saw that he was greatly disappointed when I shook my head. 'Fer five years, rain or shine, winter or summer, he has come to my house every mornin' at daylight, he

has,' he said slowly. 'The hound has learned to wait patiently; but he howled all the night, he did, an' I know some harm has come to Joe.'

"I didn't wait to prepare breakfast; but together we left the camp, following where the unleashed hound had disappeared among the trees, and guided by its mournful baying. We found Joe—lying under a great oak at the edge of a small clearing; the hound on the ground beside him whimpering and licking his cold hand. The shattered top and scorched trunk of the tree told the story; but Joe's face as it was turned to the bright sunshine which succeeded the storm was not disfigured; the wistfulness had left the eyes, and there was a placid smile on his lips. The lightning had done its work mercifully, and I recalled the thunderclap which had awakened me and preceded the final disappearance of my ghost.

"Which one of us shall carry the news to Jinny?" I asked, and Jerry looked up at me after he had tenderly closed Joe's eyes.

"There ain't been no Jinny these five years back, there ain't, except in poor Joe's crazy head,' he said sadly.

"As we sat beside the body in the clearing awaiting the arrival of other searchers, the gates of silence were opened, and in a low voice, to the accompaniment of the hound's whimpering, Jerry related the pitiful history," he continued. "In a homely guise it was the same old story which has brought so much misery into the world—the story of two men and a woman.

"Lon was the black sheep of their clan; a reckless stripling, a frequenter of the taverns in the neighboring villages, and a terror to the local constables and game wardens. Joe, the weaker vessel, was his firm friend and admirer; helping him out of scrapes and sticking to him steadfastly through good and evil report. Jinny, for whom Joe had prepared a home, to her sorrow also loved and admired the ne'er-do-weel, who heartlessly betrayed them both. His promises were light as air, and when she begged him to make the only possible reparation he jeeringly

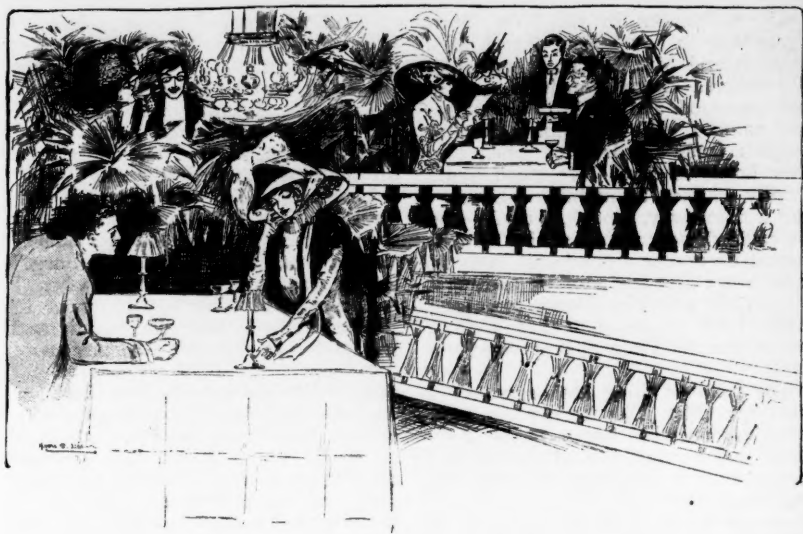
refused, and taking his gun departed for the woods.

"An hour later Joe heard the story fathered out by a shamed, heartbroken heap of misery on the floor, and followed him, after promising Jinny that he would bring him back to make things right; but when he returned he was alone, the right barrel of his gun was empty, and he went to his room without speaking. They found Lon, his black heart torn out by a charge of buckshot, lying under the very tree which the lightning had just shattered. Jinny mercifully died the same night, and when Joe came downstairs the next morning he had lost all memory of his wrongs and the double tragedy. His hair had turned white in the night, and as the shadows lengthened he took his gun and started for the woods to find Lon, whom he imagined to be lost.

"The mountaineers, all of them kin to the actors in the tragedy, kept the thing quiet—not a difficult thing to do in that isolated community in winter—and for five long years they watched Joe depart each night on his quest; guarding among themselves the secret of his crime. The hound would never again enter the woods with him, and he returned for it each morning to Jerry's cabin, always hurrying home to the Jinny whom he imagined to be waiting.

"An' I reckon as how he's found both of 'em now, I do,' concluded Jerry simply, as he looked at Joe's peaceful face. 'They say as how Lon's ghost walked the forest at night, always keepin' away from him; but no dog of our'n, nor any of our kin, would come into these woods after sunset, an' hunters always left the region sudden after the first night in camp, they did.'

"When the others came we carried the body to Joe's cabin, the house he had prepared for Jinny. When we entered the parlor my attention was attracted by a tintype over the crude mantel. It represented a group of three; Joe as he must have looked before the tragedy, a sweet-faced country girl, and the other—the man who had twice been an unbidden guest at my camp fire."



The Confessions of a Stenographer

By Anne O'Hagan

ILLUSTRATED BY H. VON S. LUCAS

III.

JANUARY 1—10 A. M.: I am a nice, grateful specimen of the human female, I am! After the very best Christmas in the world, I came back to a sort of holiday-disorganized office, and have loafed, like all the rest of the staff, through the rest of the week. Mr. Petersen had gone to Hot Springs for over the New Year. It is easy to tell that he's away. I imagine there will be a change in the atmosphere when he comes back.

Well, what I started to say was, that instead of being happy over the recollection of my Christmas, I'm dumpy because I didn't get another check and especially another holiday for New Year's. And—I might as well be honest with myself, and since this is New Year's, I guess I'll make a resolution

to be honest with myself all the year, no matter what I may have to be with other people—to be honest with myself, I'm blue because no one has asked me to go and play golf at the Westchester club to-day, and then to come in town in time for dinner. And that's what June Flower—silly, high-heeled creature who couldn't swing a club to save her life, I don't believe—has for her prospect to-day. I know, because I was at the Van Rensselaer when Mr. Fletcher asked her. It was the night before last. She has paid me six dollars on account, and I'm copying a new poetic drama of hers.

Oh, and to be honest, I'm blue and dumpy because I was up too late last night and was out with all the howling, shrieking mob that was uproar-

iously welcoming in the New Year. Every one in our house, except Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Bleecker, went out. We roamed down Broadway, jostled and squeezed and pushed, but somehow amused. We blew horns in other people's faces and laughed when they blew horns in ours. We stood under Trinity chimes at midnight—about a half a mile away, though, I think—and we couldn't hear a single thing but the immediate uproar around us. Then we came home and had a rabbit and some beer in Mr. and Mrs. Sloat's room, and finally I fell asleep about three o'clock. It's no wonder I'm a gloomy wreck to-day.

The funniest thing has happened—I went into Mrs. Bleecker's room after breakfast to wish her a happy New Year, and I found her all fluttery and excited over a note she had had in the morning's mail. And who should it be from—or from whom should it be, or whatever the right way of saying it is—but my poetess? She was thanking Mrs. Bleecker, in the prettiest fashion, and on her crested paper, for a little note Mrs. Bleecker had written to her apropos of some verses she had had in one of the Christmas magazines.

"You know," said Mrs. Bleecker, very much elated over the poetess' quite gushing reply to her compliments, "I often write to people whose things I admire. I'm an old woman, my dear, and I have a great deal of time to spare. Why shouldn't I use it to tell those who give me pleasure that they have given me pleasure? If I were younger, if I were going about, it might be different—it might seem pushing, intrusive. But I'm an old woman, with no affairs of my own." She sighed. I knew she was thinking of her girls who died and of her boy who ran away. Then she brightened up. "But I must say I never had so sweet an answer from any one as this from that gifted June Flower. See—she says she wants to come and see me."

I saw, and I nodded. I was trying to make out what Miss Flower's little game was. It isn't in her to do a merely kind, unselfish thing.

"And you know it came so late, so long after I had written to her, that it is all the pleasanter. At first, I thought she didn't care for letters from strange old women. I wrote when I first read the poem—you remember it, don't you? 'O Little Son, whom I have borne, To lift the cross, to wear the thorn'—"

I remembered it. I had read it with some surprise that June Flower had ever written anything so comprehensible as that "Mary's Christmas Song." But I also remembered that, when I had spoken to Miss Flower about it, she had sniffed rather disdainfully and had said that she didn't do any more such banalities now—that was an old thing. Yet her note to Mrs. Bleecker was couched in very different, very modest, appreciative terms.

"Well," the dear old lady prattled on, "when no answer came from my little note of compliment for two or three weeks, I thought either that the magazine editor hadn't forwarded it to Miss Flower, or that she didn't feel like bothering with strangers. But here—it's quite five or six weeks ago now—is this sweetest letter!"

I can't understand it.

Ten P. M.: Oh, what a fine day this has been, after all! What a good pre-sage for all the year! I had just finished writing my gloomy New Year's morning entry when Delia, the raw-boned, cross chambermaid and waitress, who would be quite unendurable if she weren't neater than wax and swifter than lightning, came up to the attic and told me that there was a gentleman to see me in the parlor. I went down full of wonder. I don't know any gentlemen to come calling on me. And there sat Mr. Fletcher!

"Why—why!" I began stupidly, for I had been picturing him as halfway to Westchester with June Flower by that time. "Why, how do you do, Mr. Fletcher?"

He laughed. "You seem surprised to see me," he said. "Ah, I remember—you were at Miss Flower's the other night when we made our engagement for to-day. Well, the poor girl has a sick friend and has been suddenly called

to Brooklyn to see her. Isn't that de-testable luck for the New Year? A sick friend—and in Brooklyn! And so, I came over to see if you would not take pity on my loneliness and come out to Westchester with me? You see, I didn't get the message in time at my rooms—and here I am, clear downtown."

It isn't dignified, I suppose, to be perfectly happy at finding oneself second choice, but I declare I was. The day had looked so long and gray ahead of me. Doctor Mabel had gone away to spend it with some friends in the suburbs. All the household had some festive plan except me. Even Mrs. Bleeker was going to be called for in a carriage and conveyed up to a great house on Riverside Drive. Mrs. Johnson was hating me as the sole cause of a big noonday holiday dinner, and I have no doubt that the cook and Delia were ready to poison me. So I didn't have even a second's qualms about Mr. Fletcher's being merely a temporary "hand-me-down" of Miss June Flower's. I told him so, and went to put on my hat and coat in quite hilarious spirits.

There is one thing I can do, though I say it who shouldn't—I can play golf. Jimmie and I used to make for the public links every Saturday afternoon and every Sunday and every holiday at home—and for good instruction in the gentle art of golfing, commend me to an athletic younger brother who scorns to flatter his sister. And I had missed it so, since I came to New York. Of course I hadn't any clubs, but I felt as though I could use any one's successfully, even the long-armed man's beside me.

"If you don't play golf, Miss Eldridge," he began, "we can take a tramp and turn up at the club for luncheon when——"

"But I do," I wailed, frightened lest I should be done out of what I was so eagerly anticipating. "Only, of course, I haven't any clubs."

"Oh, that's all right. I have the key to my sister's locker. Miss Flower hasn't any clubs, either, and she was

to use Jessica's; so you can be outfitted all right. Have you played much?"

I was afraid to boast, so I said "a little" and murmured something about being out of practice. He looked resigned.

It has been one of those steely gray days that sometimes precede a snow-storm. The air has been tingling; it would have been uncomfortable if one were not aglow from exercise. The ground has been hard frozen and rutty from the marks of a recent thaw. It wasn't ideal ground for golf, but it was pretty good! And when I, in Miss Jessica Fletcher's long, gray coat sweater, and my own veil tied around my hair—I can't bear anything blowing when I play golf—tried the pliable handle of her driver at the first tee, my blood fairly sang for pleasure. And when I hit the little white ball a clean stroke that raised it, and sent it sailing, sailing, making a long white arc in the air, I did feel exultant. Dirckman Fletcher looked at me with a new sort of interest on his friendly face—more admiring than his usual kind regard—and said:

"Why, Miss Eldridge, you play golf!"

I laughed.

"Why else should I be here, Mr. Fletcher?" I asked. "Did you really think I wanted nothing but a chance to be with——"

Then I stopped. It sounded brazen, and somehow like poor Hattie Lawlor's sort of witticism.

"Why don't you finish?" he dared me. There was quite a new look in his face now. But I hurried away in the wake of my caddy, who, seeing my good drive, had assumed the air of being responsible for it, and also of feeling an enormous pity for the other caddies of women. It was a judgment on him and me that my next stroke should land me ignominiously in a bunker.

Well, the day was a huge success. However much Mr. Fletcher is in love with Miss June Flower, he does love to be out of doors, talking and laughing and swinging his arms. He had a good time—that much I'll vouch for. And



"Did you really think I wanted nothing but a chance to be with——" Then I stopped.

by evening, though his face was just as friendly, it wasn't quite so—so—philanthropically friendly as it has always been in the office. That was a change I must say I appreciated.

We got back to the city a little before seven. We had meant to get back earlier, for I had declined to go to dinner with him—I thought he had more than done his duty by the "poor working girl" that day—but we had

missed our trail and then some fiend had induced us to trolley in. It was nearly seven when we reached One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street.

"You'll have to reconsider your determination about not dining with me, Miss Champion," said he. "You wouldn't be able to get to Grove Street, and the angel cake and cold ham and preserved pears, not if we chartered the swiftest automobile in the city."

"How did you know about holiday suppers in Mrs. Johnson's?" I demanded.

"Mrs. Johnson's is a boarding house; all boarding houses have the same holiday suppers; ergo—Didn't you know, Miss Eldridge, that the Mystic Circle of the Boarding-house Keepers is pledged by the most awful vows and penalties never to depart from a certain small list of viands for their Sunday and holiday-night banquets? It's true. But where shall we go, since even that limited menu is lost to you? Would you rather go down into the city, or to one of the big restaurants on this thoroughfare?"

I was hungry—golf does that for you. I said that I thought, since we had missed the stewed pears at home, we'd better get something to eat as quickly as possible. We went to a great, big, glittering, noisy restaurant on the street. It wasn't in the least elegant, though the food was all that could be desired, and though there was a really good band playing, and though it was enormous and much ornamented. And it swarmed with people—"The People," I should say; nice, cheerful souls with a fondness for noisy cheer and good things to eat. There were lots of family parties at the tables—small children out under the wing of their prosperous, smiling parents—all sorts of people except the kinds that overflow the big downtown restaurants, I imagine. We got a little table in a balcony, next the rail, so that we could look down upon the jovial scene below. It was certainly very merry.

Suddenly my companion, who was making himself very entertaining in a nice, idle, good-natured way, broke off in the middle of a sentence. I had been listening to him rather indifferently, with my eyes on the busy scene below—the crowded tables, the hurrying waiters. I looked up when he paused so abruptly, and I saw that he was staring toward the opposite balcony. Almost directly across from us, the soulful Miss Flower, looking quite lovely and impressive in black furs which had been given her for a Christ-

mas present, was seating herself, with the thin, affectedly bent, blond Mr. Rodman Priestley.

Dirkman controlled his face at once, when he saw that my eyes had followed the direction of his.

"I didn't know that poets ever came so far out of the Washington Square beat as this," he laughed.

I murmured something intended to be agreeable and reassuring about how nice it was that she hadn't had her entire New Year utterly spoiled by her sick friend in Brooklyn. His lips set themselves in rather a severe line as I spoke; though, indeed, I was sincere in my desire to say something that would not leave him with the impression that the sick friend had been a myth, and the whole thing a trumped-up excuse to enable her to spend the day with Mr. Priestley. I don't think that Mr. Dirkman Fletcher would find it easy to forgive a lie, from his look across the big restaurant.

He soon assumed his usual cheerful manner again. I couldn't keep my inquisitive eyes off the couple across the balcony, but he seemed to forget them. As for them, they were so absorbed in posing for each other's benefit, and making conversation for each other's bewilderment—"playing the game," I have heard Miss Flower call it—that they never looked across toward us once. They didn't even look at the scene about them, except to throw it a condescending, amused glance when they first came in—the sort of a glance the gods and goddesses might have occasionally thrown the earth before returning to their own Olympian pursuits!

Well, we went down to Grove Street after our dinner, and Mr. Fletcher thanked me for a very pleasant day. He said it as though he meant it, too, and there was no hint in his voice or manner of the table across the way.

January 3: I am a white-winged angel—that is what I am! I went over to the Van Rensselaer to-night to do some copying for Miss Flower. She asked me kindly about my holiday. I said that it had been very pleasant.

"I had a wretched time," she said, sighing. "You know I was to have gone out to the country for a day in the open with Mr. Fletcher. Well, at the last moment, I was summoned to a friend's in Brooklyn—I didn't get back until midnight. Absurd, wasn't it, anybody's wanting impractical me in a crisis of sickness? But it happened so."

I felt my cheeks burning. Finally, with my eyes fixed on her little typewriter keys, I blurted out:

"Miss Flower—please forgive my butting in, but don't tell Mr. Fletcher that. You see—you see—we saw you—at Heinz's—at dinner."

She looked at me hard, out of narrowed eyes, for a second. Then she threw her head back and laughed—laughed and laughed!

"Well," she said, "you have found me out. But do you think it's really wrong to tell—oh, tarratiddles—in a good cause?"

"I never thought about it," I answered.

"And it is a good cause, saving people's feelings, isn't it? You will admit that, even if you are the sternest of moralists, won't you?"

"I'm not the sternest of moralists; people's stories are none of my affair. And I suppose it is better sometimes to fib than to wound people gratuitously."

"We all do it," went on Miss Flower in a conventional, argumentative tone. "We do it when we say we're not at home, instead of that we don't want to see our callers. We do it when we tell women their hats are becoming. We do it all the time. But why should I try to justify a universal practice on such grounds? I tell stories because I feel like it. I'm not bound by other men's pretended principles. I claim the right of the free soul to express itself however it will—in lies, if it happens to want to! However, I'm much obliged to you, Miss Eldridge, for the—tip, I suppose you'd call it. I don't want to do anything inartistic, and to tell a lie in which discovery is assured is inartistic, don't you think?"

"Of course you're joking," said I, though I had my doubts on that score.

"Of course I am," she agreed.

A little later I heard her talking on the telephone to Mr. Priestley. She told him, airily, not to imperil his immortal soul by saying that he hadn't seen her New Year's, in case he should meet the Man of Fact anywhere. And then, with much laughter at her end of the wire, at least, they proceeded to arrange a story which "would not come apart in the telling," she said. From it I learned that she had never been near Brooklyn that day, that she hadn't a sick friend in the world, that she had merely thrown Dirkman Fletcher down because at the last minute the English poet had offered her his society for the day. It made me boil with anger to think of such a decent, straight sort of a chap as Mr. Fletcher being deceived for such a hop-o'-my-thumb of a creature as the other. There is something so trifling about the poet's whole make-up, physical and mental. But it's all none of my business. Nice men fall in love with queer women and nice women with all sorts of brutes all the time. What does it all matter?

January 7: June Flower and the English poet have been to see Mrs. Bleecker! The dear old lady is in a state of the most twittering excitement and delight. I'd like to know what in creation June Flower wants.

January 10: It is practically decided that the railroad will establish the spur which will either go through or skirt the Baylawns property. Every one is much excited. Every one has some pet scheme for acquiring the Baylawns property; but no one seems to have thought of offering Mrs. Bleecker a fair price on it.

January 11: Mr. Petersen sounded the bell on my desk with a peculiarly hideous squeak and squeal to-day, and when I went into his office he looked at me with a particularly malevolent air. His nose seems to become beak-like when he is trying to stare you into a state of utter mental collapse.

"Sit down," he growled. I sat.

"This Baylawns woman—this foolish



"Miss Flower—please forgive my butting in, but don't tell Mr. Fletcher that."

old lady who won't part with her property—this ancient simpleton who sacrifices dollars to sentiment—what do you happen to know of her family relations?"

"Not very much. There isn't much to know, I think," I answered. "She has been a widow for twelve or fifteen years or so. Her two daughters died in childhood. She had a son, but he was wild, I fancy, or willful, or didn't get on with his father. At any rate he ran away from home some eighteen or nineteen years ago, and they haven't heard of him since."

"Disinherited by father's will?" Mr. Petersen fairly bit the question off at me.

"I suppose so—I don't know. I only know the father was very bitter toward him and would have no search made for him."

"Um!" He paused for a minute and then he telephoned to the titles department.

"Send some one down to Long Island

City to look up titles to the Baylawns estate," he growled. Then he turned again to me. "There's a chance, of course, that the son wasn't disinherited. If the old man died intestate, why, the son would have to be declared legally dead before the mother could sell. We must see about it at once."

It never occurs to him that in the end Mrs. Bleecker won't sell. He never allows himself to act upon the assumption that anything contrary to his wishes is going to happen. I suppose that that's why things usually do go his way. He's the most material, cold, hard man I've ever seen, and yet he's rapidly converting me into a believer in mystic powers. I am perfectly sure that it's his tremendous will to believe himself successful that makes success attend him. Still, if anything could oppose him I dare say it would be just a flighty, uncertain, dear little sentimentalist like Mrs. Bleecker. A steel bar has so much more effect upon a rock than upon a fluffy feather pillow!

January 12: I was able to inform Mr. Petersen to-day that old Mr. Bleecker had died intestate, and that Mrs. Bleecker had only her thirds in his property, but that she had been appointed administratrix.

He scowled at me and swore.

"That means we'll have to have the son declared dead, legally. You're sure that the old lady isn't really in communication with him, but not acknowledging it, because he's a blackleg or something?"

"If he had ever shown up again, and were the sort of person you suggest," said I, "wouldn't he have claimed his share in his father's property?"

"Sounds reasonable," grunted the chief. "There are times when I have hopes of making a good business woman out of you. You have gleams of intelligence. Why don't you go in and get that commission? I think we'd make it the whole thing—the regular fee—ten per cent. You could do a good deal with fifteen hundred, now couldn't you?"

"Lots," said I. "But she couldn't do so much with seven hundred and fifty."

"What d'you mean?"

"If she were so foolish as to sell her property for ten thousand dollars or fifteen, she couldn't hope for more than five hundred or seven hundred and fifty a year for income, could she? Well, you see, she can let Baylawns summers now for five or six hundred, if she wants to; and I've forgotten how many tons of hay the place cuts; and she could, if her other investments turned out badly, go there to live winters. And, sentiment apart, she can do a little sum in plain and simple arithmetic as well as the next one."

"Um! Have you been directing her thoughts to arithmetic?"

I couldn't help smiling a little. The dear, foolish old lady had been talking a little on the selling side the other day, and I certainly had called her attention to a few mathematical facts.

"You'll be fired the first thing you know," commented my boss. But he spoke quite genially. And as I left the room, he called after me:

"I don't say we mightn't go as high as twenty thousand—or even twenty-five—to keep your elderly protégée comfortable."

"She's very comfortable as she is, thank you," said I.

January 15: As I came up the steps of Mrs. Johnson's refuge last night, the door slammed behind a tall, well-dressed man who seemed familiar to me as he put on his high hat and ran down the stone flight. I was a little puzzled by his seeming so entirely known to me, when, upon reflection, I had to decide that I didn't know him at all. I had paused with my key in the lock to watch his rapidly moving figure through the dusk of Grove Street to the corner where the Eighth Street cars make bands of swiftly vanishing light, and he turned to look back—evidently at me. But I didn't know him, and went on in. Old Mrs. Bleecker was hovering on the confines of the parlor, as she often is at evening, poor, lonesome, chatty old dear, waiting to intercept some of us from the world of out of doors. She called me in her fluty, old voice:

"Miss Eldridge? Oh, it is you, isn't it? Do come in here for a minute, if you can spare the time."

I followed into the parlor, although I was dying to get upstairs and change my boots and remove my collar and generally freshen up. She moved about very mysteriously, looking out of the windows as though she suspected listeners on the sills, and investigating behind the portières as though it was the arras in "Hamlet" with that old busybody of a prime minister dead behind it.

"Who do you think has been to see me, Miss Eldridge, my dear?" she whispered, very importantly.

I shook my head to indicate that I couldn't imagine.

"But you must guess, you really must," she insisted.

"Miss Flower?"

"No—not for two or three days. I mean to-day—this very day."

"Well, if not Miss Flower, probably

not Mr. Priestley either. I give it up, Mrs. Bleecker."

"Some one about my place!"

"But you're always having those. Meyer-Grimson send at least three a week."

"But this wasn't from Meyer-Grimson!"

I was considerably astonished and a little excited. Mrs. Bleecker was charmed at the effect her words had produced on me.

"Was it some one from the MacNaughton Realty people?" I asked, referring to our great rivals in the development of our neighborhood of Long Island.

Mrs. Bleecker shook her head, with a little dimple of pleased mystery at the corners of her dear old mouth. "No?" I felt a little disturbed at this information. If not the MacNaughton people, who?

"You must have met him just leaving," said Mrs. Bleecker.

"Oh, was it the tall gentleman in the silk hat?"

Mrs. Bleecker declared that it was. "It makes me feel quite like a belle again, having so many gentlemen calling on me," she said sprightly. "It's you they ought to be coming to see, my dear—you and Doctor Bickford, if she would only be sensible enough to give up that foolish doctor business. I must say I like old ways best, child, and I've told Doctor Bickford herself that she's cutting off every chance in the world she might ever have of getting a good home and—"

But to-night I wasn't interested in the matrimonial prospects of Doctor Bickford.

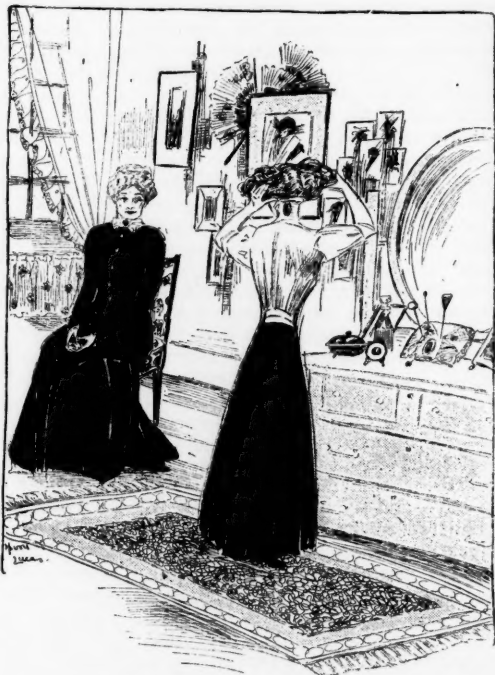
"If it wasn't the MacNaughton people, Mrs. Bleecker," I interrupted her, "do you mind telling me who it was?"

"The railroad," said Mrs. Bleecker solemnly and with the deepest enjoyment.

"Oh!" was my somewhat inadequate response.

Then I said I must go and freshen up for dinner, and she said, kind old heart that she is, that she had some fresh lavender water—two bottles in an enchanting case which had come as a belated Christmas present—and she was going to bring one up to me to put on my poor head immediately.

"It's the most refreshing thing in the world, and it will cool your forehead after your hard day," she told me. "Now, I insist. Dear me, how all you wonderful girls who go out into the world ever manage to do as much as you do—" And she broke off, words to paint our wonderful accomplishments failing her.



How she would have loved it, had her daughter lived!

As I potted about my room, changing my stout shoes and my Unbreakable Hose—guaranteed—for slippers and lisle thread, and my dark flannel waist for a white seersucker—you can wash them yourself and they don't need ironing; Hattie Lawlor calls them the working girl's salvation—and dabbling some of the refreshing water on my hands and forehead, the good old lady prattled on to me. How she would have loved it, had her daughters lived!

"That's a sweet little waist," she said. "I like you in white—I like all young people in white. What a sweet little underwaist that is—hand-embroidered, too! You're an extravagant puss for all your sober ways. Oh, a Christmas present! Well, it's a very pretty one."

It was a pretty one. Mrs. Benthorn had given it to me, making me feel very remorseful that she should have squandered her eyesight on such exquisite needlework. I had again that strange little sense of the connection between her and Mrs. Bleecker. That lady was running on about clothes and beaux and all the proper feminine interests. My mind busied itself again with the agent of the railroad.

"Does the railroad make you a good offer?" I asked, with as casual an air as I could muster.

"Well, it doesn't exactly make me an offer. But the gentleman who called upon me—he knows they're going to make me an offer, he has inside information. But he says that it will be a poor one; it's a soulless corporation, he says, and it will use every advantage in dealing with a lone old woman. So he wants me to give him an option on it—for more than the railroad will offer—and he'll buy it, if it is really finally decided to build some sort of a branch or something right down to the bay—and—you understand?" She floundered toward a conclusion which evidently did not seem quite so glittering to her as it had seemed beneath the persuasive eloquence of the railroad's "agent."

I replied, somewhat tartly, that I thought I understood perfectly.

"The man wants to get an option on

your place at a low figure so that he can sell it to the railroad at a high one," I said.

"Just like the Meyer-Grimson people, isn't he?" said Mrs. Bleecker, with a pleased little laugh at her own astuteness.

I had to admit the soft impeachment. But it did make me mad that, if any one was going to benefit by her child-like ineptitude for affairs, it shouldn't be our company. I didn't want any fee for getting her place—I didn't want to be mixed up in the business. But I didn't want our office to lose the game to some more wily bargainer. So I talked to her quite severely about the necessity of holding on to her place until a really good offer was made her by some responsible party. I played upon the string of recollection and sentiment, as well as upon that of calculation and caution. She sighed and wiped her eyes, and said, "yes, indeed" to the minor and the major themes alike. But she added that of course the place would never seem the same to her if a railroad should go thundering through near by, and a cheap own-your-own homes suburb spring up beyond her orchard. I saw the argument of the gentleman in the tall hat!

January 18: I did not suppose it was possible for me to feel so utterly miserable. Dirkman Fletcher has proposed to June Flower. She told me so. I went there to-night. There was a bowl of mignonette and carnations—a high punch bowl of them—standing on a slender-legged little table with a leaf folded backward against the wall—a Sheraton, I've heard them call it. I exclaimed over them, naturally, as who would not? And she said that they were lovely in a plain, common, or garden fashion, but that for her part she thought she preferred something with a little more subtlety, a little more rarity.

"Though these," she added, "have one excellent quality of a floral offering—they quite adequately express the giver." I knew who the giver was. She sighed—not affectedly, but a good, honest, lonesome sort of a sigh. Then she turned to me and said: "Tell me—

wouldn't you think a young woman lucky to have Dirkman Fletcher in love with her, and wanting to marry her?"

"If she was in love with him and wanted to marry him," I replied as tersely as possible, opening the machine.

"Not otherwise?"

She seemed unlike herself. She wasn't posing, she wasn't trying to impress me; she was just honestly threshing something over in her mind.

"Not otherwise," I answered.

"Well, I wish I were in love with him then, or wanted to marry him. For I know he's a stalwart, reliable sort of a man, and that a woman who cared for him could be happy with him. But I'm afraid I don't—that way. But I'm taking time to consider, I'm taking time to consider!" Then she looked at me queerly. "I suppose you think I'm lacking in the finer feelings to be willing to talk about my proposals like this, don't you? Well, you know 'the finer feelings' are a set of hypocrisies and conventions like so many other things people swear by. At least I claim the right to think my own thoughts and live my own life."

Well, I'm back in my attic. There's one thing I will say to myself and say and say: "Don't you be a fool, Joanna Eldridge! Don't you be a fool!"

January 19: He walked out of the office with me this afternoon and rode down in the elevator with me. I felt as though my silly, telltale face was announcing what I knew.

"Are you riding or walking?" he asked me when we reached the door.

"Walking," said I firmly.

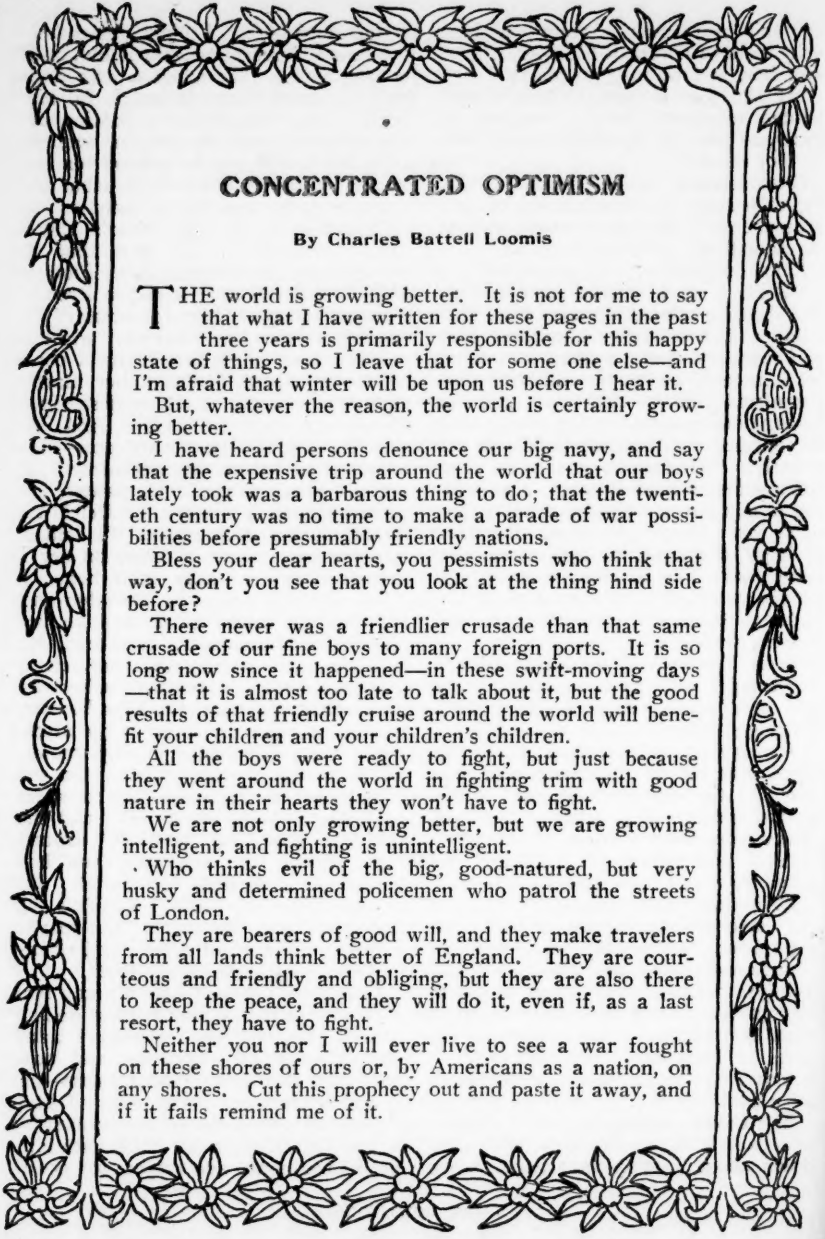
I have always walked to and from the office; it's the only exercise I can count on each day, and although I was dying to get back to my room to gloom in comfort—if any one can understand what that means—I have made up my mind to keep on in my own way, to get over this nonsense— Oh, not to be a fool!

We talked—rather jerkily, I think—about one thing and another. We were down about Twenty-third Street when

he mentioned—it. I don't remember just how it came about, but it did, and he was saying that when a man had done a woman an injustice in his thoughts, he always had a passion of remorse afterward, he always wanted to be put to the test to redeem his injustice. I didn't know quite what he was driving at then, but he went on:

"You remember New Year's Day? You remember I told you that I had an engagement with Miss Flower which the illness of a friend in Brooklyn had obliged her to break?" I nodded. "Well," he went on, "when I saw her at Heinz's that night, I confess to a sudden doubt of her morning's explanations. I felt as if she had thrown me down deceitfully. And I—very cheaply, it seems to me now—determined to let her convict herself, if she had fibbed to me." He paused for comment, and I nodded. "Well," he picked up his story again. "I laid a trap for her. When I called on her I pretended not to have seen her. I asked after the friend in Brooklyn and regretted the failure of the day we had planned at Westchester. And then, she told me quite frankly that her friend had been more frightened than hurt by an accident, and that she, Miss Flower, was home again by three in the afternoon. She telephoned to my rooms, but of course I wasn't there. So she telephoned to Priestley—he's a great pal of hers—with better luck; and she told me they had 'bummed' around town during the afternoon and had turned up at Heinz's for dinner. Of course, after my bluff, I couldn't tell her I had seen her there. But maybe I wasn't ashamed of myself and of my common suspicions of her truth."

Of course I wasn't such a gump that I didn't realize he was talking, telling me all this, so that I shouldn't think June Flower had played fast and loose with him that day. And I know—oh, it makes me sick! Why didn't I keep my mouth closed the other day and let her lie herself on to her finish with him, out of his regard and respect for good?

A decorative border of stylized flowers and leaves surrounds the text.

CONCENTRATED OPTIMISM

By Charles Battell Loomis

THE world is growing better. It is not for me to say that what I have written for these pages in the past three years is primarily responsible for this happy state of things, so I leave that for some one else—and I'm afraid that winter will be upon us before I hear it.

But, whatever the reason, the world is certainly growing better.

I have heard persons denounce our big navy, and say that the expensive trip around the world that our boys lately took was a barbarous thing to do; that the twentieth century was no time to make a parade of war possibilities before presumably friendly nations.

Bless your dear hearts, you pessimists who think that way, don't you see that you look at the thing hind side before?

There never was a friendlier crusade than that same crusade of our fine boys to many foreign ports. It is so long now since it happened—in these swift-moving days—that it is almost too late to talk about it, but the good results of that friendly cruise around the world will benefit your children and your children's children.

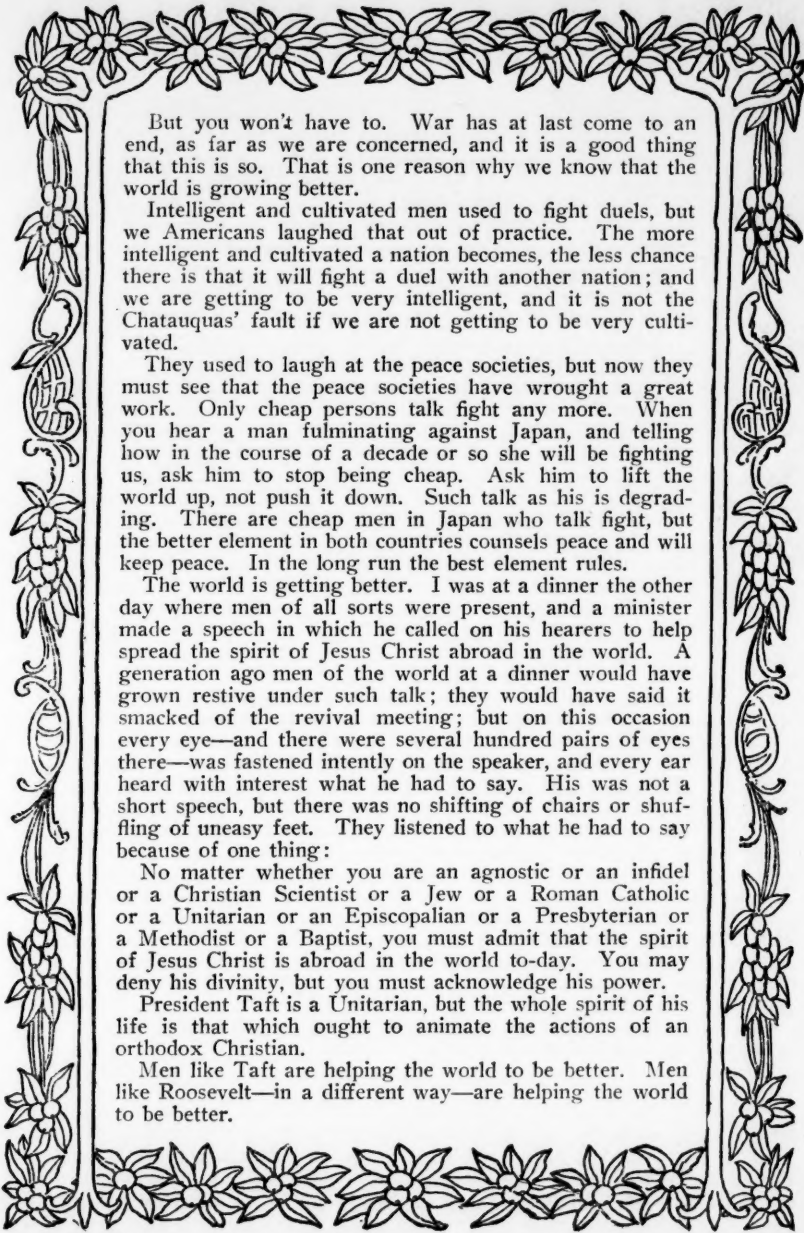
All the boys were ready to fight, but just because they went around the world in fighting trim with good nature in their hearts they won't have to fight.

We are not only growing better, but we are growing intelligent, and fighting is unintelligent.

Who thinks evil of the big, good-natured, but very husky and determined policemen who patrol the streets of London.

They are bearers of good will, and they make travelers from all lands think better of England. They are courteous and friendly and obliging, but they are also there to keep the peace, and they will do it, even if, as a last resort, they have to fight.

Neither you nor I will ever live to see a war fought on these shores of ours or, by Americans as a nation, on any shores. Cut this prophecy out and paste it away, and if it fails remind me of it.

A decorative border with a repeating floral motif, featuring stylized flowers and leaves, framing the text.

But you won't have to. War has at last come to an end, as far as we are concerned, and it is a good thing that this is so. That is one reason why we know that the world is growing better.

Intelligent and cultivated men used to fight duels, but we Americans laughed that out of practice. The more intelligent and cultivated a nation becomes, the less chance there is that it will fight a duel with another nation; and we are getting to be very intelligent, and it is not the Chatauquas' fault if we are not getting to be very cultivated.

They used to laugh at the peace societies, but now they must see that the peace societies have wrought a great work. Only cheap persons talk fight any more. When you hear a man fulminating against Japan, and telling how in the course of a decade or so she will be fighting us, ask him to stop being cheap. Ask him to lift the world up, not push it down. Such talk as his is degrading. There are cheap men in Japan who talk fight, but the better element in both countries counsels peace and will keep peace. In the long run the best element rules.

The world is getting better. I was at a dinner the other day where men of all sorts were present, and a minister made a speech in which he called on his hearers to help spread the spirit of Jesus Christ abroad in the world. A generation ago men of the world at a dinner would have grown restive under such talk; they would have said it smacked of the revival meeting; but on this occasion every eye—and there were several hundred pairs of eyes there—was fastened intently on the speaker, and every ear heard with interest what he had to say. His was not a short speech, but there was no shifting of chairs or shuffling of uneasy feet. They listened to what he had to say because of one thing:

No matter whether you are an agnostic or an infidel or a Christian Scientist or a Jew or a Roman Catholic or a Unitarian or an Episcopalian or a Presbyterian or a Methodist or a Baptist, you must admit that the spirit of Jesus Christ is abroad in the world to-day. You may deny his divinity, but you must acknowledge his power.

President Taft is a Unitarian, but the whole spirit of his life is that which ought to animate the actions of an orthodox Christian.

Men like Taft are helping the world to be better. Men like Roosevelt—in a different way—are helping the world to be better.

Graft is bad. Thanks be to the muckrakers, there is less graft to-day than there was five years ago.

Do not belittle the muckrakers. They have done a great work, and the larger spirits among them have done it disinterestedly, even if they were paid for their articles. They have done it as good Americans who wished to see their house put in order.

They have helped to better the world.

There is no question but that the "malefactors of great wealth," to quote a memorable phrase, have helped to better the world with the money they have "gained."

I am not making excuses for the way they got it, but they have certainly put it to great uses.

It may have been fear of the populace that started them on the right track, but they have gotten a taste for well doing, and the hospitals and the institutions for the study of disease would not have been possible if these men had not amassed great wealth.

All turns out right in the end.

A great earthquake but hastens the time of death for a few thousand. It is awful because it is lumped in one place, but there is not a day goes by that does not see a hundred times as many deaths in different places.

The virtue that grows out of the many being dead in one place is the quickening that is given to the spirit of charity. Nations vie with each other in help for the survivors, and the whole world is made better.

Can Italy think of Russia other than as a friend when she recalls what the Russian sailors did at Messina?

She has always known that America is her friend, but the ties have been visibly strengthened this year.

The world is getting better in that the spirit of charity is growing broader all the time. Travel is what has helped to do this thing, and the voyage of the navy helped as no band of voyagers ever helped before.

We can all help. We can all avoid being cheap. We can take a large view of things. If we believe in the brotherhood of man we are Christians, even if we never go to church and have a prejudice against ministers.

And if you believe in the brotherhood of man you may grow broad enough in time to take ministers into the brotherhood.

The world is growing better, and now that it has started nothing can stop it.

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A Deal In Pig - Tails.



By Holman F. Day.

ILLUSTRATED BY CH. GRUNWALD

SEVEN elderly men, of a distinctly nautical cut of jib, came in single file down some dingy stairs, and out of the gloom of a hallway, to the street. They stood on the curb and, one after the other, put up their arms, crooked their elbows, and stretched and yawned.

"It's goin' to be pretty much a dead calm, the rest of it," observed Cap'n Osney Cole. "It seemed to me he smoothed down terrible quick," he added regretfully.

"I was lookin' for more to be said and done, myself," agreed Cap'n Cook. "One way you look at it, we mutinied on his skipper, took charge of the brig, and was about as near piruts for forty-eight hours as we well could be. If there was ever an excuse for a man to go into the air and stay there till he'd made trouble for us, he had it. But Englishers ain't what they was before we licked them along here in eighteen-twelve."

The bright waters of the port and the vista of the Bay of Fundy glistened in patches between the waterside buildings, and Cap'n Cook gazed that way thoughtfully.

A man came down the same stairway by which they had gained the street.

He was buttoning an alpaca coat over a real John Bull rotundity.

"Very easy do you get off, you Yan-kees," he snapped; "too easy. It seems worse to me as I think of it."

"It does to us," confessed Cap'n Cook.

"I have a mind yet to make you smart for it. You come to me and calmly confess that you mutinied on the high seas. Damme, if that isn't American impudence for you!"

"Yes, sir, a plain case of it," agreed Cap'n Cook. "The only redeemin' feature is that we brought your brig to port free of all charge."

"I'll know the truth when I get out there and talk with our skipper." He went down the street a few steps, and came back and shook his fists at them. "And if brig or master are the worse for this affair, you shall suffer."

"So far as the brig goes," stated Cap'n Aaron Sproul, "I sailed her with six master mariners for crew, and she was never sailed so well, and if that weevil-drilled skipper of your'n hadn't tried to tell me my business he would not be locked in that fo'c'sle now, waitin' for you."

"Infernal outrage, the whole of it!" the other shouted back at them over his shoulder. He disappeared, going toward the water front.

"It's nothin' but whelthin' at a hummin' bird with a batstick—fightin' with

lim. Bizz—buzz—back and forth! The bottom has all dropped out of the whole fight." Cap'n Sproul stated it sourly.

They all yawned again, set off by a prodigious effort in that line by Cap'n Cole.

A fat, lumpy, oily chunk of a man who had been standing at a little distance, listening to the colloquy with interest, approached the group ingratiatingly.

"As near as I could understand, gents," he said, with the staccato utterance of "the breather," "you was in the right of it. But what was the dispute?"

They did not warm under his smile. They stared at him coldly. But at last a glint of recognition showed in the eyes of Cap'n Cook.

"Hain't your name Usial Tate?" he asked bluntly.

"Why, it is—it certainly is," chirruped the stranger. He cocked eye of inquiry at Cap'n Cook, and wrinkled his fat forehead in an effort to return this courtesy of identification.

"You might not remember me—probably wouldn't. But my name's Cook. I was nigh by handy that time when the revenue cutter nabbed you off Boston Light with that cargo of wool you was smugglin'."

That identification was like a smack across the face. It paralyzed Mr. Tate's smile.

"That—that was sort of a queer mix-up," he stammered. "But those government fellows do make mistakes. That was a mistake."

"You let the mistake go too far, then," remarked the inexorable Mr. Cook. "'Cause they libeled and sold your schooner and cargo, for I was there at the marshal's auction—and I saw by the paper that you got ninety days in jail."

"I was dragged into that by others," declared Mr. Tate desperately. "But it taught me a lesson to have nothin' more to do with men who get you into scrapes. I hope you gents won't think I'm a lawbreaker."

"Say, look here!" ejaculated Cap'n Tansom, not interested in the exposé,

and studying a huge silver watch. "If we're goin' to catch that train that we looked up, we've got to up killick."

"Cuss a train in this weather!" snapped Cap'n Sproul, flicking perspiration from his forehead with his finger.

"How did you get here?" asked Mr. Tate, still ingratiating, and plainly eager to change the conversation from his own affairs.

"Brought the *London Lass* from Rockland—seven shipmasters of us—because her crew had deserted, and the skipper couldn't sign a new one on account of her reppytation for grub. I don't know who got up the reppytation. Whoever done it didn't make half use of his chances," added Cap'n Sproul grimly.

"And you was sayin' you'd locked the skipper up?" persisted Mr. Tate. "Left him aboard, I think you was sayin'."

"Be you lookin' for items for a newspaper?" queried Cap'n Sproul sarcastically.

Mr. Tate flushed.

"I didn't mean to act like puttin' my nose in," he apologized. "But I was reck'nin' whether you was leavin' the *London Lass* for good."

"Leavin' her!" snorted Cap'n Sproul. "What are you takin' us for—Portygee sailors? We're seven retired shipmasters, I tell ye, and we brought that brig acrost for fun. For myself, I was needin' the sea voyage—and I need some more," he muttered, as much to himself as to the others.

"If you gents was only lookin' for a chance back, now, I could say a few things that would be more interestin' than talkin' politics," said Mr. Tate wistfully.

Cap'n Sproul was the only one who indicated any interest—and his eyes spoke for him.

"It's this way," pursued Mr. Tate eagerly. "Things is pretty quiet with me this time of year, in hot weather. I won't load lumber, bricks, or granite; be darned if I will. It racks a schooner. And I've got a good one. When the cannin' factories start I'm chartered

for the season. You may have sailed for the fun of the thing on that Blue-nose brig, but you don't look as though you'd got what you come after. If you gents are needin' an outin', my schooner's for charter for a week or ten days—or shorter time."

"Most we want to do is to get home," broke in Cap'n Cook.

"Shorter time is more agree'ble to me," assented Mr. Tate. "To tell you the truth, I'm expectin' to pick up a cargo on to Boston when I get to Rockland. It's goin' to be handy for all of us."

"You seem to be cuttin' your breadth of business to fit our'n pretty close," suggested Cap'n Doty suspiciously.

"It's the time o' year that does it," explained Mr. Tate, mopping his face with a dirty handkerchief. "There's myself, two men, and the schooner, and good livable grub. I'm a friend of Cap'n Cook, here, and I'm goin' to make allowances." Cap'n Cook's expression indicated that he did not appreciate exactly the basis on which this friendship was founded. "I know all of you by reputation. Of course money ain't any object to you, you bein' retired ship captains that's got it tucked away."

"Don't lay it on too thick," growled Cap'n Tewksbury. "The only dog that ever bit me was the one that was waggin' his tail hardest when he come up."

Mr. Tate looked aggrieved. This collection of ancient mariners seemed to be distinctly offish.

"You don't want to lay that wool mistake up against me, gents," he pleaded. "I'd like to have you aboard my schooner for a little cruise so that all misunderstandin's can be cleared away. And to show you that I'm willin' to do my part, I'll take you from St. John, here, and land you down in Rockland for five dollars apiece. There!"

He set his stubby legs wide apart, and looked from one to the other in triumph.

"Just charter her—come up to the broker's office and charter her and come on," he declared, while they gaped at him.

"What in blazes do you want us to charter for?" demanded Cap'n Cook. "We'd only be goin' as passengers. What's the ketch?"

"It's plain and open sailin'," protested Mr. Tate. "I see you can't forget that wool mistake that you saw. But don't judge that way. If I had had my papers right that time there wouldn't have been any trouble.

I propose to have papers right after this. Always a charter after this, down in black and white and all straight at the customs office." He stuck up a row of stumpy fingers and bent them, one after the other. "Chartered by Such-and-such, schooner *Frolic*, Cap'n Tate, for Such-a-place, canned goods. Ditto, ditto, and ditto, miscellaneous cargo. Ditto, ditto, cruise for pleasure. I tell you, gents, a man that's once got into a mistake with the government can't be



Cap'n Sproul leaned against the rail near the wheel, eyeing Mr. Tate.

any too careful about charters and havin' responsible people do the charterin'. There's nothin' like right and proper and solid names at them custom-houses. There's my side! Everything regular after this! Do you blame me? Come up and charter."

"Say," mumbled Cap'n Tansom in Cap'n Sproul's ear. He had his big watch out again. "I don't like the looks of that feller. You could put a handle onto him and oil two masts and a deck with just what's on the outside of him, say nothin' about squattin' him a little. Let's ketch that train."

"That's my idee," agreed Cap'n Kitchen, who had overheard.

"Gents," said Cap'n Sproul, speaking so that all could hear, "I'm a little different in my feelin's about this than you are. I've been tied up in-shore a number of years, and I'm hankerin' for a little more salt water. I ain't goin' to argue with you. But you can go back, bumpin' up and down in a car seat if you want to. I'm goin' by that schooner, even if I have to charter her alone."

The other six looked at each other and then at the resolute face of their companion.

"We've been havin' a middlin' fair kind of a time so far, all things considered," said Cap'n Cook at last, "and it's too bad to break up the party."

"I'm down for relaxation and a little sloppin' around in green water," insisted Cap'n Sproul. "I've spoke my say. I'm goin' with Tate."

"Then we might's well all go that way," assented Cap'n Cook grudgingly. "There ain't enough difference to make a row about. But—five dollars apiece for a charter of this sort! I swear it looks as though there was some kind of a ketch about it."

"There might be a ketch if I was tryin' to bleed you," replied Tate a bit sharply. "But I don't believe in lookin' gift hosses in the mouth, myself."

Cap'n Tansom returned his monitory watch to his pocket slowly and unwillingly.

"Gift hoss without any teeth ain't worth a hoot; gift hoss with too sharp

teeth is li'ble to bite," he observed oracularly.

"I've been a gent in price and proposition," said Mr. Tate, rebuke in voice and mien. "I like to be doin' something, and I like company—good company. I don't know where any one could pick out better society than ship captains, especially the retired kind. That's all there is to it, and the man that would be suspicious in circumstances like these would slip his watch in his bootleg before he'd let his mother come nigh to kiss him." He looked sourly from the corner of his eye at the last glint of the disappearing watch.

"You lead the way, Cap'n Tate," commanded Cap'n Sproul. "Them as wants to come along can come; them as don't can go back either swimmin', flyin', or in a railroad train, as they choose."

The seven of them swung into line when Tate started away, though Cap'n Tansom was quite a gap behind and stamped along as though trying to kick the bricks down into the ground.

When the formalities had been complied with, a bit later, the schooner *Frolic*, Tate, had been chartered by Messrs. Sproul, Cole, Cook, Tewksbury, Kitchen, Tansom, and Doty for "a fishing cruise." Mr. Tate had suggested that declaring that quest for the object of the trip would do as well as anything. His point was, merely, that after one sad experience he wanted to be on the safe and business side, chartered by responsible parties and all straight with the customhouse.

The *Frolic's* clearance certificate was granted without question.

"Now, gents," said Mr. Tate, "this charter bein' rather unexpected to me, I've got some few things to arrange and it will take me the rest of the day. I reckon you'll be wantin' to look the city over. I'll have a yawl in at the end of Commercial Wharf at ten this evenin'. I'd like to have you show up on the dot." Then he trotted off.

Cap'n Tansom thought that was a queer hour to ask decent men to wait for. Cap'n Sproul saw the matter in another and entirely favorable light. He

urged them to follow him and see the sights, and talked encouragingly of the prospects of taking in a theatre show in the evening at his expense. At ten o'clock, when they were trudging down to the wharf, even Cap'n Tansom agreed that when men really made up their minds to have a good time they could have it.

In the dusk at the foot of the landing stairs Cap'n Sproul made out the yawl, with its two oarsmen.

"Yawl of the *Frolic*?" he asked.

"Ay, ay, 'sir," returned one of the men. And they embarked.

It was considerable of a row to the schooner. Cap'n Tansom's hair-trigger suspicion began to comment on the reasons for anchoring so far out, but the men who rowed pulled away doggedly without bothering to explain.

When they clambered over the rail, Cap'n Tate met and welcomed them with real gayety.

"Now she's yours to command aft," he declared. "Settle the two staterooms as you see fit, and arrange to stow yourselves. Plenty of beddin'; the lockers are just as good as a berth."

He left them to themselves. Promptly they heard the chatter of the capstan's pawls.

"He's heavin' her short," said Cap'n Sproul. "I didn't suppose he was goin' to get clear to-night."

But it was plain that Mr. Tate did so propose—and the whine of blocks succeeded the capstan's racket. Cap'n Sproul filled his pipe for a smoke before turning in, and went on deck and leaned

against the rail near the wheel, eying Mr. Tate who steered and whistled blithesomely. The *Frolic* was heading out to sea with a land breeze that hummed joyously in the sail hollows.

"This is something like," affirmed Cap'n Sproul. "I suppose I'm relishin' it more than my friends are—for I've been hankerin' for salt water. It's like malaria, I reckon. A sailor has a run of sea hankerin' once in a while."

"I hain't got much likin' for it," confessed Mr. Tate. "I'm natch'ally a land man, myself. The hotel business and a sportin' life suit me; I want to own a house in a place where a fellow can run a little game and have a bar. I'd just as soon be in a monkistry for life as to go to sea all the time. If it wasn't a good way to make a dollar I wouldn't be here. But I want to rake enough together for that hotel I've got my eye on."

Cap'n Sproul had expected the enthusiasm of a fellow mariner, and was a bit chilled. He looked aloft without speaking, seeking companionship in canvas and rigging.

"Your fo's'l ain't peaked to draw right," he observed at last.

"It's good enough so long's she keeps goin'," returned Mr. Tate carelessly. "I never bother how she looks so long's she sails."

"I'd just as soon step forrard and give her a tug," proffered Cap'n Sproul eagerly. The two sailors had disappeared.

"I don't want passengers forward of the break," stated Mr. Tate, with an air that Cap'n Sproul



Then he got down on his knees and laid his ears to the deck.

had not seen in him before. "The quarter-deck, here, is plenty of room for 'em." His tone was offensive.

"Seein' that I'm one of the crowd that's chartered this schooner, I'll come pretty blasted near goin' wherever I want to." That tone had provoked rebellion.

"That's nice talk for a man to make when he's sailed ships as long as you have," remonstrated Mr. Tate. "What would you have done to a passenger that talked that way to you aboard your ship when you was sailin' one?"

"Well, I would probably have kicked him up and down the lee alley and then banged him down through the gratin'," confessed the passenger frankly.

"Jusso! But I ain't natch'ally of a bloodthirsty or quarrelsome disposition. All I want is discipline aboard, and I figured that you gents, havin' been ship-masters yourselves, would be the last to break over rules. Landlubbers don't know rules aboard ship, nor how necessary they are. I reckoned, of course, you all knew—and of course you do. Orders is that passengers stay aft."

Cap'n Sproul, properly rebuked, knocked the ashes out of his pipe and went below to his blankets. He fell asleep reflecting that life up inshore and association with landsmen must have caused his appreciation of ship-board rules to deteriorate; for when Tate had spoken to him in tone of authority his first impulse had been to cuff Tate's ears.

At breakfast, served aft promptly by one of the sailors who converted himself into cook by tying on a white apron, Cap'n Sproul communicated to his companions the orders regarding the passenger privileges of the *Frolic*.

"This ain't no ocean liner," objected Cap'n Tansom. "There ain't no sense in rules like that. What has he got forrard that he don't want us to see—that's what I want to know! I tell ye, I've been suspicious of that feller from the start."

"You've got to let a man run his own vessel, so long as he's decent about it," stated Cap'n Sproul.

"You seem to be pretty consid'able in love with him since meetin'," sneered Cap'n Tansom. "But he ain't got *me* hypnotized. We'll see about that goin' forrard business!" Chewing the last mouthful of his breakfast, he stumped up the companion ladder.

"Do I understand there's orders that we shan't leave this quarter-deck?" he demanded. He faced Tate. He was still chewing. His little eyes were blinking. His jowls hung down. He bore resemblance to a suspicious and particularly obstinate pig.

"Them's orders," stated Mr. Tate, his fat face indicating that he was not wholly at ease.

"What for?"

"Just orders."

"Look here," cried Cap'n Tansom, "if I was a toddlin' infant or a meddlin' woman or any other of them things that needs orders given to 'em on ship-board, them orders would be all right. But I've sailed ships myself, and I ain't goin' to tumble overboard nor cut ropes nor whittle my initials. And I'm goin' forrard."

"By thunder, if this ain't what you get by tryin' to use folks like gents!" cried Mr. Tate, his voice shrill with rage. "Ain't you goin' to stand by me, the rest of you that's been masters, and see that orders is obeyed aboard here?"

The six orderly ones smoked placidly. The one disorderly mariner marched down upon the main deck and trotted forward with haste that hinted at fear that he would be pursued. He took his seat on the capstan head and sat there defiantly. Mr. Tate grumbled his resentment.

"It's my vessel and it's my orders," he stated at last to the others. "I'm goin' to give word to have him lugged back here where he belongs."

"Advise ye not to," remarked Cap'n Sproul. "It means a scuffle and hard feelin's."

The master of the *Frolic* forbore, but he was plainly ill at ease and kept Argus eyes on the rebel. Cap'n Tansom presently displayed marked interest in something other than the seascape. He lifted his nose into the air like a hound

seeking scent. He cocked his head first to one side and the other, with the air of a man who was curious respecting sounds. Then he got down on his knees and laid his ear to the deck.

"I hain't goin' to stand this any longer," yelled Mr. Tate. "Hoy, there, forrards! Rout that passenger aft!"

The men were husky, and Cap'n Tansom did not resist. They dragged him by the arms and boosted him upon the quarter-deck.

When they faced each other, Mr. Tate's face was pale and convulsed. Cap'n Tansom's beady eyes glittered.

"What ye got for a cargo below decks, there?" he demanded, brandishing accusatory fist toward the forepeak.

"Canned goods," stated Mr. Tate huskily.

"Well, if they're canned tongues they've busted open and have got to talkin'," exploded the scout. "There's men down there, I tell ye," he cried excitedly, turning on his astonished comrades. "And I hain't sailed the Chiny Seas not to know what kind of men they be! When I get a whiff from an opium pipe and hear 'em jabberin' 'wun lung ching a ling' talk under my feet, I know it ain't veal calves or dressed poultry. I'll tell ye what you're doin', you fat-faced gob of devilishness—you're smugglin' a lo'd of Chinks into the States!"

"I saw him ketched with wool once, myself, as I've told you," cried Cap'n Cook.

"What business is it of yours what I take for a side line?" snarled Mr. Tate, now at bay and desperate.

Cap'n Tansom seemed to be the only one with breath and self-possession to reply.

"What business is it of our'n? What bus—you've gofered us into charterin' this schooner—our names on the pa-



"What ye got for a cargo below decks, there?" he demanded.

pers. You've got us aboard here for a blind if a cutter comes along and overhauls you. You've probably got such a cussed reputation of your own that they're out looking for you. You think you're goin' to use us to stave 'em off. This is the kind of a plot we've been pulled into—and you done most of the pullin'," he barked, turning on Cap'n Sproul and pushing a knurly fist under that gentleman's nose.

By that time Cap'n Sproul had recovered some of his natural self-reliance in emergencies.

"If it's up to me to straighten out things aboard of every vessel I go over the rail of lately, by Judas, I'm ready for the job!" he declared. He put one hand on the wheel, shouldering Mr. Tate, and roared: "Hands stand by to come about!"

But Mr. Tate now promptly shed the last semblance of policy. He set his stubby legs and shouldered Cap'n Sproul.

"Watch foward!" he yelled. "Put the barkers on 'em."

And with promptitude that proved that this order had been awaited, the two sailors mounted the fo'c'sle and brandished rifles.

"Take your hand off that wheel," gritted Mr. Tate, "or I'll have 'em bore ye, and have the law with me at that!"

Cap'n Sproul obeyed. It was not a time for bearding a shipboard autocrat on his own throne.

The seven old captains drew together into a huddle and stared from Mr. Tate at the wheel to his armed crew on the fo'c'sle.

"You may think you've got into the habit of runnin' other folks' vessels for 'em, but this ain't the *London Lass* you're on now," jeered the master.

"Where are you goin' to land us?" inquired Cap'n Sproul after a time.

"Where I'm damn mind to." Mr. Tate's air did not invite conversation. Nor did the passengers feel in mood for pleasantries among themselves. The use that Tate was making of them was perfectly plain. Their helplessness was fully as apparent.

The *Frolic* held to her course. She had made an offing that left only a dim blue streak to mark land on the northern horizon.

"Now that you're placed and know where you belong," said Mr. Tate patronizingly, after a long silence, "I'm tellin' you that I've got fifteen Chinamen stowed forward there—fifteen that's been waitin' a chance to get into the States for some time. I'm goin' to be honest and frank. I'm gettin' two hundred apiece from each one. Fare is collected and salted. And this is my last trip to sea. Land and a good sportin' hotel for me after this! Now, there ain't any real need of your layin' it up against me because you're helpin' me pull off this trick. I might have been able to smuggle them Chinamen one or two at a time. Workin' the bunch at one slap is more profitable. The idee came to me when I saw you fellers in St. John. Now for the meat of the thing! Are you goin' to stand by me,

and take the cuss off'm me if that cutter boards us?"

He got no reply.

"I'm a sport, myself," Mr. Tate went on. "I'm always willin' to bet on the turn of a card. I'm bettin' now that you ain't goin' to blow, but are goin' to help me bluff, in case it's needed. If it ain't needed, all good. But I know what would happen to me, with my reputation, if they overhauled me and you wasn't aboard. I reckon you're well known along coast, the whole of you. With the charter as it is, and you aboard, you're goin' to find it easy to bluff. If they come aboard and you only put it to 'em right, they won't hunt. Now, if you blow, lettin' your angry passions run away with your best judgment, I shall point to the charter and clearance certificate and say it's your trip and your business."

"There ain't a man in the whole United States that would believe it," shouted Cap'n Cook.

"Get caught with the goods on you, and see what the court and the folks will say," commented Mr. Tate. "Them revenue fellers are always just anxious and achin' to convict. They'll have you in jail before you know it. People on shore is always ready to believe the worst about any one."

This was a philosophy that Cap'n Sproul had often expounded, and his thoughts grew bitter. But as to compounding felony with this fat rogue who had used him as chief instrument, his decision was instant and grim.

"You—you puff toad!" he exploded. "Don't you try to get me into your game. If I could holler loud enough I'd climb the mainmast now and holler this thing to Washington. And you needn't think I won't holler when the time comes."

"That the final word?" inquired Mr. Tate balefully. "Better think hard."

"It's the final word for me," declared Cap'n Sproul.

"And that's good enough for the whole of us," stated Cap'n Cook. "Ain't I right, boys?"

There was no doubt about the unanimity.

"You'll jump into the bramble bush and push me in, too, even if your own eyes get scratched out, hey? Bound and determined to do it, are you?"

"You bet we are!" boomed Cap'n Sproul, banging his fist on the rail.

"I stood ready to compromise," said Mr. Tate, mingled regret and wrath in his tones. "But I ain't goin' to argue. I was tryin' to be square, and I looked for better things from you. But you've blocked me, and it ain't my fault. I'm desperate from this on. Look out for me and don't get in the way."

He acted with a celerity that showed that the plan had been canvassed with his men. The sailors came aft and drove the seven captains at the muzzles of rifles to the main deck. One stood guard, and the other man brought up food and a breaker of water and loaded the yawl that was suspended from the stern davits. Tate brought the schooner into the wind, and his men dropped the yawl. They clambered down nimbly, and he stood astride the rail, ready to leap.

"What do you mean by abandonin' your schooner?" roared Cap'n Sproul, running to the quarter-deck, and no longer deterred by the rifles.

"She ain't mine," barked Mr. Tate. "I hired her for the trip on the strength of your charter. Now you can see how you stand. But you wanted it that way, and now you've got it. Go to the devil, you and your Chinese! I've got my money."

He poised himself and jumped. When he had recovered his balance he yelled at them through hollowed hands: "You dare to bring my name in and I'll swear that you mutinied on the high seas and set me and my men adrift. And I've got the case of the *London Lass* to fall back on for proof that you're that kind. And you follow me now and I'll pump lead into you."

His men set a spritsail, and the yawl bobbed away toward the distant shore.

Cap'n Sproul caught the wheel, for the *Frolic* was paying off too rapidly. His master mariner friends came aft and joined him. They gazed at each other solemnly for a time. But their

gaze finally focused on Cap'n Sproul, and there was no friendliness in it.

"Let's see—you was tellin' us you was down to the shore for a little fun and relaxation." Cap'n Cook was first to speak. "Be you gettin' it?"

"You ain't goin' to lay this whole thing onto me, are you?" demanded Cap'n Sproul.

"Who was it swallowed him whole, spite of all I could say?" bleated Cap'n Tansom. "I looked up the train time. I wanted to go by the train. So did the rest of us. You went and dragged us off hellity-larrupin' into this scrape. If there was another bo't I'd put her over and leave you alone in your mess. What be ye goin' to do?"

"Cuff your old chops, for one thing," replied Cap'n Sproul savagely, "if you keep up that line of talk. But the principal thing I'm goin' to do is to sail this schooner into port and declare, and place the blame where it belongs."

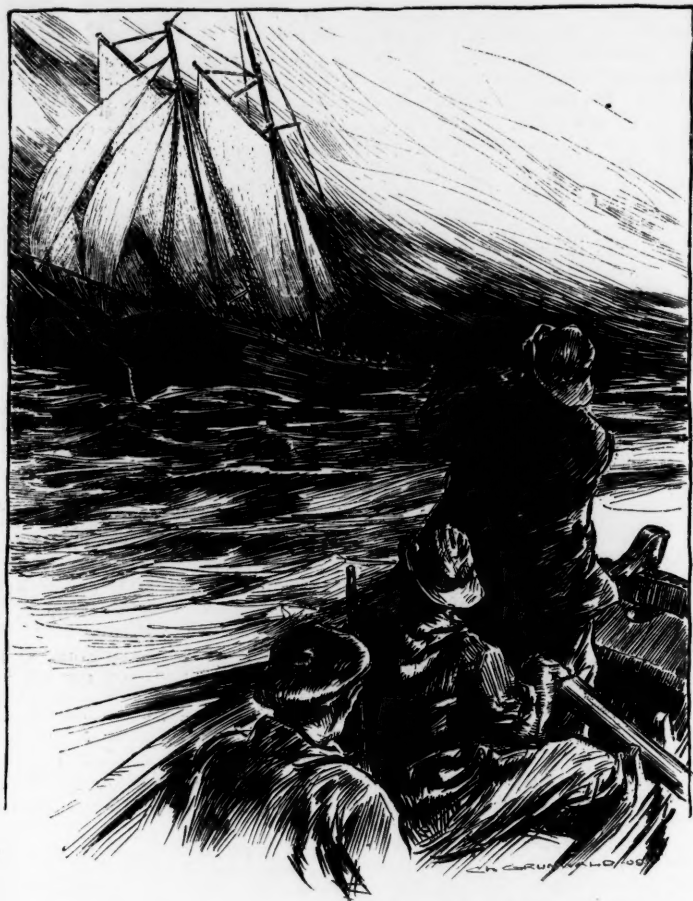
Cap'n Tansom's face expressed apprehension.

"I know what United States courts are on smugglin' cases. They won't believe that seven shipmasters was blasted fools enough to be caught this way. That whole story of the *London Lass* will have to come out. It's funny to us, but it won't be funny in court." Cap'n Tewksbury spoke now with conviction that carried. "And if they do believe us and we get clear, we'll have to emigrate. They'll holler and laugh us into the insane asylum—the 'long-shore crowd will!"

"There's the Chinamen to testify," said Cap'n Cole, gazing gloomily in the direction of their hiding place. "They'll put it onto Tate."

"Put it onto nothin'," sneered Cap'n Tansom. "They'll find it was us that dumped 'em, and they'll lie hard enough to hang us. I tell you he has played this thing as foxy as I ever see a thing played."

"Now that we're in the scrape, our only way is to get out of it as easy as we can," observed Cap'n Cook sapiently. "We'll run in somewhere to-night, and the whole of us, Chinamen and all, will get ashore the best we can and



He yelled at them through hollowed hands.

leave the old hooker at anchor for any one to claim that owns her."

"I ain't goin' to be a party to smug-glin' Chinks," declared Cap'n Sproul. "I'll show you up if you try to smug-gle 'em."

The six looked at him for some moments.

"Sproul," said Cap'n Cook, "you may be able to talk that way to them compost spreaders up in the country, where

you live nowadays, but right here you're meetin' up with six chaps that ain't of the hornless, cud-chawin' kind. You try to queer us in what we believe to be for the best interests of all together, and you and Jonah will be able to pass time comparin' notes when you meet."

Cap'n Sproul was not in a mood for argument just then. He handled the wheel and set the schooner on her course.

"A nice affair for respectable men to be dragged into," complained Cap'n Kitchen. "Aflo't with fifteen pig-tailed heathen on our hands and a revenue cutter li'ble to overhaul us any hour. The blasted tub, here, has probably got a reppytation, or else he wouldn't have played his cards to get us on board for a bluff."

"Now that we're here, I reckon we could bluff off any gold-lace fellow that should come aboard to look us over," suggested Cap'n Cole.

"Providin' the Apostle Paul, there, didn't feel it was his duty to muster passengers on deck," said Cap'n Tansom sarcastically, his beady eyes running Cap'n Sproul up and down.

The conference over ways and means lasted for an hour or more. Cap'n Sproul kept her on her course. He did not engage in the discussion. When it was decided to haul in toward shore before nightfall and hunt for a favorable spot for landing, the six expected an argument with the stubborn seventh. But Cap'n Sproul had been pondering. He reflected that it was not a time for too much uprightness. The easiest way out would be the best way. He explained his feelings curtly, and there was better cheer on board the *Frolic*.

Cap'n Cook, returning from a call upon the refugees, reported that they had enough to eat and to drink and were squatting there in the dark like cats under a piazza. It had not been a conversational call. The Chinamen could not speak English, and Cap'n Cook's command of Chinese was limited to "ongka-chop-yang," the meaning of which he didn't know himself.

"But I reckon a cuff on the ear and a h'ist with the toe of a boot means the same in Chinese that it does in English," he added. "I guess we won't have any trouble in gettin' 'em ashore when it's time to start 'em."

Before nightfall they were close enough to shore to reconnoitre, and at dusk worked to an abandoned wharf that a tongue of land hid from a village near at hand. They knew the place. A tramp of ten miles overland would bring them to a railroad station.

"We'll get the pig-tails out onto land," stated Cap'n Cook, who had constituted himself master of ceremonies in that direction, "and we ain't supposed to know anything more about 'em. And we're gettin' out of a bad scrape mighty easy."

A timid proposition by Cap'n Doty that they leave the Chinamen in the schooner was turned down.

"It's goin' to be trouble enough to explain why we abandoned her, providin' the owners get after us," stated Cap'n Cook. "Let fifteen pigtails be found battered below and even old Dan'l Webster couldn't explain himself out of the hole."

The passengers followed Cap'n Cook and his lantern on deck, but panic seized on them when they perceived in what a desolate place they were. They engaged in animated argument among themselves. They shook their heads when Cap'n Cook climbed over the rail, straddled to the wharf, and beckoned to them.

"Bos-tong," squealed one, after a mighty struggle with his memory and organs of articulation.

"That's where he was goin' to land you, was he? Well, you get off here. New deal! Understand?" All the time he kept fanning his hands toward himself. "Come along, I say!" They still balked. "I'd give a dollar apiece for Chinese cuss words right now! There's only one thing to do, gents. Pass 'em over."

Cap'n Sproul grabbed the first one. He shrieked until he was safely landed on the wharf in Cap'n Cook's clutch. The others went along more quietly, but all hung back until they were lifted over.

"I wonder," remarked Cap'n Sproul, panting and perspiring, "whether it's up to us to lug these yaller jobifferuses, one under each arm, and draw lots to see which of us lugs the fifteenth one in our teeth. Talk about a cat changin' nests with her kittens! I tell ye, we're in trouble here, and a lot of it!"

But when Cap'n Cook set the pace up the wharf, the Chinamen followed, pressing closely at his back.



They had enough to eat and drink, and were squatting there in the dark like cats under a piazza.

"There's only this one ro'd up this tongue of land through the village," stated Cap'n Cook as he trudged on. "Folks are in bed by this time, and we'll march the washee-washees right through and lose 'em up country at the first crossro'd."

There were no lights in the houses of the hamlet, and the party was well into the place in silence when the refugees halted and began shrill expostulation.

"No Bos-tong!" cried the linguist.

"You've sartinly got a sharp eye to see the difference," commented Cap'n Cook. "But you shut up that yap, the whole of ye, and come along."

The men herded, however, in the

middle of the street and increased their clamor.

"They're goin' to rout this whole place," growled Cap'n Sproul. He and the others heard the squeak of window sashes. "That may be a song or a story," he added, "but there ain't plot nor music enough to it to hold me here. I'm goin' to pelt for it!"

"We've got to get 'em along," gasped Cap'n Cole. "They've got to be took farther from the schooner than this."

"To thunder with them and the schooner! If there's leeway for guess-work we can lie out of it. But lyin' won't help if we're caught here now with the goods on us. I say, I'm goin' to pelt for it."

He buttoned his coat and started to run at his best gait. There was one moment of hesitation among his fellow mariners, and then they, too, ran at his heels. And after them came the Chinamen, madly fearful of losing their only hope of succor in an alien land. They had paid their money; they had been promised protection; and all foreign devils looked alike to them then.

The seven skippers were vigorous men in spite of their age, but the little men who came pattering behind were nimble. When at last Cap'n Sproul, leading the flight, came to a forking of the highway, he stopped, winded. He and the six skippers sat down on a rock heap and puffed. The Chinamen gathered about and eyed them in silence. In the dim starlight, their blouses, their trousers flapping loosely in the breeze, their transplanted air in that New England landscape made a picture grotesque enough. But in their grave, impassive faces there was something very like menace. Their eyes sparkled malevolently—that much the starlight revealed. Noiselessly treading on the turf, they surrounded the rock heap on which the skippers sat. Each had his little bundle under his arm—their hands were hidden in their sleeves.

"Have the rest of you stopped to think that prob'ly they've made up their minds that it's us that's got their money and has taken the job of getting them to Boston, or wherever it is they want to go?" quavered Cap'n Doty. "I ain't ever been afraid of one Chinaman so long as he has been behind a wash-tub and I had the check for my shirt, but I'll be jiggered if I like fifteen of 'em standin' 'round me like crows around a soup bone."

"We might as well have an understandin' with 'em, and have it now," wheezed Cap'n Cook.

"Understandin'?" sneered Cap'n Tansom. "How? By mind readin'? When it comes to talk you might just as well try to set down and discuss the Ten Commandments with a flock of Angory goats. I tell you, gents, that though you think you've been seein' some

trouble past back, you are just gettin' into it."

"Well, do something, and do it quick, if there's anything you can do," snapped Cap'n Sproul. "I've run all the foot races with them kydunkers that I intend to! I don't propose to set here on this rock heap all night. When I'm pickin' a starry night for a ramble I ain't pickin' any washboard piannerists to go along with it."

Cap'n Cook arose and cleared his throat as though to speak, but confined his remarks to dumb show. He pulled out a wallet and slapped it on his hand and shook his head. He pointed to his six companions and shook his head. He swooped his hands far out to indicate rotundity of person, put the wallet into his pocket, and buttoned his coat. With thumb outpronged, he jerked his fist to the east, then flapped both hands at the Chinamen as though to shoo them away, and pointed up one of the branch roads.

Those whom he had sought to impress surveyed him in chilly silence. It was silence that was baleful.

"Now, Cook," said Cap'n Sproul after a time, "them remarks of your'n was no doubt vallyable, full of meat and to the point. But I want to ask you how you can expect them heathens to understand what we real human bein's can't get head nor tail of? I don't want all the fine points of your remarks. Just give me a bulletin on the main gist."

"I don't see how any one with eyes and common sense couldn't understand," yelled Cap'n Cook, deeply offended. "I said to 'em that we didn't have their money, but that the fat man got it and scooted. And then I told 'em to take that ro'd and be on their way."

"Didn't know you could be so eloquent on short notice," observed Cap'n Sproul. "They'll be havin' you around to banquets before you know it."

The interpreter began angry retort, but Cap'n Sproul bore him down in vociferousness.

"Here's a speech for 'em," he roared, "and we'll make it in chorus, and there won't be any fine talkin' in it to hide

the main meanin'. Each of you take one of these rocks in your hand and hop up and threaten to bat their jee-hoofery brains out if they don't hump themselves up that ro'd! Up with ye!"

They came onto their feet with him, each with a rock.

"Now, you yaller-bellied Cochin Chinys," he yelled, brandishing his rock, "hiper!"

One shrill hoot of defiance from the fifteen replied, and the next instant each Chinaman had whipped a long knife out of his big sleeve. The heathen did not retreat an inch.

"Well," sighed Cap'n Tansom, after a long pause, "this seems to be developin' into quite a spicy joint debate—considerin' what speeches have been made up to date."

In that crisis the spokesman of the refugees decided to give voice. With knife slashing the air, he screamed a breathless volley of Chinese language at them, and wound up by jabbing his knife in the air in all directions of the compass and shouting, over and over: "Bostong!"

Then the parties to the conference stood and stared at each other for a time. Cap'n Sproul broke the silence

first, and disgust and exasperation were never written more plainly on the human countenance.

"This parade is goin' to move," he rasped; "but cuss the man that drew plans for the Tower of Babel."

He started away, heading up country, still clutching his rock.

His six companions plodded at his heels, sullen and silent. The Chinamen followed, pertinacious and suspicious.

"Seeing that this fix is mostly your own manœuvrin', and that you have been lookin' for fun and relaxation," remarked Cap'n Tansom after a while, "I hope you're gettin' all you expected out of it, Cap'n Aaron Sproul."

The cap'n smashed his rock into the undergrowth and kept on.

"But there's something that's got to be done," persisted Tansom. "What are you goin' to do about it?"

"Look for a gun, a quiet place, and soft ground where fifteen Chinamen can be killed and buried," replied the cap'n balefully; "that is, if I can't run foul of some one who understands English and can swear hefty in Chinese. Now let's have less talkin' in the ranks."

And the oddly assorted procession went on under the stars.

(The sequel to this story will appear in the October number.)



Not the Reason

THE élite of Koontown were assembled to witness the christening of Brother Judson's seventeenth baby. As Deacon Franklin took the ebony treasure in his arms, he squared his shoulders and cleared his throat for a flowery bit of eloquence.

"Brothers and sisters," said he, "we ought all to congratulate de mother of dis chile upon another gift of de Lawd. Sister Judson is favored of de Lawd. an' she shows her rightful sperrit by namin' her offspring to please Him. Her boys is called for de disciples, her girls is called for females in de Scripture, an' for precious stones derein. Followin' dat idee, dis chile is also to become a jewel in de heavenly crown. She is to be christened Onyx!"

Sister Judson, radiant throughout this eulogy, succumbed to the proddings of a tender conscience, and interrupted the parson. "No, suh," she said, "dat's not de onliest reason I give her dat name; hit war beca'se she war onyx-pected!"

THE GREAT CONSPIRATOR



—BY
*Howard
Fielding*

ILLUSTRATED BY F. X. CHAMBERLIN

[We consider this one of the best mystery stories written in recent years. It will appear in four installments in this magazine.—THE EDITORS.]

CHAPTER I.

MRS. FRANCES SEABURY ranked third among the rich women of America, and second among those who had made their own fortunes. She was a financier skilled in the most intricate operations, a famed strategist in the warfare of money, keen to see advantage, quick to grasp it, strong to hold it.

For the edification of the public she has been variously portrayed; praised as a pillar of credit, maligned as a merciless and predatory animal, spoken of with profound respect upon a page of her morning paper, and offensively cartooned in another part of the same issue. Hearing men speak of "Fanny" Seabury's rapacity in pecuniary dealings, you would have thought that only fools would go to her for loans, and the next day you might have seen the same men in her anteroom with their hats in their hands. Every high pirate of the yellow sea saluted her flag as he passed, and the great admiral of them all conferred with her about the scuttling of galleons. To such eminence had she risen from the ruck of the well-to-do.

Twenty-odd years ago she was a

pretty girl who had just made her debut in Philadelphia society. Her father was Horace Deering, a lawyer, clever but honest, and not very well off. At his death his worldly possessions passed to his daughter, and they did not exceed fifty thousand dollars. Presently she married Gilbert Seabury, my father's brother, and that wedding is my earliest recollection; my conscious life as I look back upon it seems to have begun with the sight of Aunt Frances in her bridal veil. Singularly enough, this memory has always assumed the most dire and dismal aspect. If a boy not yet three years old can have an impression of tragedy, I must have got one on that joyous occasion, though nothing unusual happened.

There is no tradition that my aunt had shown a mercenary spirit in her girlhood, or had displayed any aptitude for business affairs. Certainly she did not marry for money. Gilbert Seabury was a merchant in a fair way of business, but he was a pauper in comparison with other suitors for the hand of beautiful Frances Deering. Very recent investigation has led me to believe that the first hard bargain in which Aunt Frances took a hand was the purchase of the old Seabury man-

sion and other property from my father, who was then upon the edge of the pecuniary difficulties which soon afterward engulfed him. If she had the better of him in that matter, she squared the account to some extent after his death; for she paid all his debts, and took his orphaned and penniless child, myself, into her care.

About this time Uncle Gilbert died, and Aunt Frances inherited his worldly goods; whereupon she made haste to sell the business and to convert all her property into cash, even mortgaging the Seabury residence for the largest sum she could obtain. The genius of the financier which had slumbered in her hitherto was now awake. She saw the approaching panic of ninety-three, and she knew that ready money could be made to grow like a rolling snowball. Doubtless she had been studying credits, for she was already a director in a bank. It is certain that she had been a diligent student of the laws which financiers must bend to their desires. From that moment there was never a break in her advance; she became a power; she flourished like the green bay tree mentioned in Scripture.

A monstrous parsimony began to prey upon her like a disease, and when I think upon the strength of it, I wonder that she did not fall into the most sordid practices of the miser, and even to a life of voluntary squalor. Something of the kind would certainly have happened had she been alone, but there were three young people underneath her roof, and in her own strange way she loved them all, and modified her life for their sakes.

Of the three, John Deering was the only one that had a drop of blood in common with Mrs. Seabury; he was her brother's son, while I was merely a nephew by marriage, as has been disclosed. Another member of the household, completing what may be called the "family," was Sylvia Leland. A dozen years ago, when Sylvia's father died, Mrs. Seabury took charge of her, though there was no legal adoption. I had always understood that there was a sincere friendship between Leland

and Mrs. Seabury, and that she had pledged herself to him in his last illness to protect his child. As for Sylvia, she knew nothing of the details; but she believed that her father had sanctioned the arrangement for good and sufficient reasons, and it was an article of faith with her that he could never err upon a question of conduct. Therefore, although she was always of an independent spirit, she accepted Mrs. Seabury's bounty without qualms, and would have been glad if it had been more liberal. Her tastes were naturally extravagant, and I know that she was scarcely more comfortable than Jack Deering and myself in the constant presence of this wealth which benefited nobody, and of this pitiful parsimony which accomplished no useful end.

I know that Mrs. Seabury sought in vain for any sign of capacity in Jack or me, but I have never understood exactly what we seemed to lack; indeed, it would surprise me to learn that we had any mental quality, or even any deficiency, in common. He was a youth of furious energy. He went through college in a whirl of varied activities; ranked high, shone with an unmatched effulgence in the sports, and enjoyed an idolatrous popularity which did not turn his head. Entering a year behind him, and following in the train of sparks which he emitted like a shooting star, I must have been invisible to every eye, but for his help and the accident of physical fitness for the games. When he emerged upon the world there were a dozen lucrative and promising positions waiting for him; but visible opportunity is one thing, and destiny is another. The embodiment of destiny in the present instance was Aunt Frances, and Jack became an underpaid clerk in the Seabury Trust Company. One year later the same door opened in my path and closed behind me.

Now, all this sounds ungrateful and unkind, and I am perfectly well aware of it. I should give an unjust idea of myself if I pretended to have ordinary feelings about money obligations. In regard to my aunt's expendi-

tures on my account, I have not now and never have had the most shadowy semblance of the sentiment of gratitude. And this is not because the money measured so extremely small beside her monstrous fortune; it is not because the entire expense of my college course was my aunt's income for thirteen hours and twenty minutes; it is because I am constitutionally unable to see the debt. If my aunt had been impoverished to the last penny, I should not even then have felt the faintest impulse to repay the sum which she had spent, and to have squared the account would not have given me the smallest satisfaction. My obligation would have been to do the best I could for her, to do right, and not to pay money; and if, in such a situation, any thought of her expenditures for me, as an amount expressed in figures with a dollar sign before them, had entered into my heart, I should have felt ashamed.

Perhaps this is what she saw in me, though I concealed it scrupulously; but she could not have detected it in Jack, because it wasn't there. He had no use for any man who did not pay pecuniary debts, and it galled him to the bone to be that sort of man himself—driven to it by a sanguine temperament and a rigid, insufficient income.

Mrs. Seabury made no secret of her intentions toward the three of us. Sylvia and Jack and I were to inherit wealth. She mentioned no amounts, but when her conversation dealt with the subject of our "prospects," the unmistakable tinkle of millions was in the air. She let us understand that we were rather a bad lot. Upon the occasion of a memorable Christmas dinner when we really had nice things to eat, she spoke of us with genuine affection as her "three incapables," and made quite an address, not without eloquence.

"Didn't you feel like a cripple or something of that kind?" I whispered to Sylvia when it was over, and my aunt's attention had been drawn aside. "I began to count my bones."

"I was looking at the little tear on her nose," responded Sylvia. "Nobody else sheds such small tears as Aunt Frances. Tiny things like diamonds. Did you ever notice it?"

"Often," said I. "It is a species of economy." But Sylvia rebuked me, and was very sweet to Aunt Frances all the remainder of the evening.

The three incapables understood that much would be forgiven them, but that there was one deadly sin, to borrow upon their prospects. Jack or I could have obtained large sums in this way, but we had pledged our word not to do it, and we never did. Nevertheless, we found means of running into debt, and even Sylvia did not escape. If she took a fancy to a bit of costly lace—her one great weakness—all mention of price or payment would be avoided as a theme accursed, and the sole effort of the crafty milliner would be to get poor Sylvia out of the establishment with the lace in her possession.

"My assistant shoplifters," Sylvia called the tribe of them; and she accumulated a small hoard of precious fabrics hidden in a secret place, things that she dared not use, or even look at except behind locked doors. Occasionally she would have what she would call a "sale," parting with her treasures in mysterious ways, to confidential friends, who robbed her in the price. Then she would weep for the things, and be unkind to Aunt Frances for a day or two; but there'd be one bill out of the way.

A species of insanity took hold upon us, but Mrs. Seabury was wholly blind to it. She seemed to think that we constituted an ideal household; nay, not seemed, she really thought so. Her love for us was very odd, but it was genuine. She had a peculiar greed of affection which could be satisfied only by the simplest forms; little, distant, mechanical crudities of expression which her imagination seized upon and vivified. I think it was a childless woman's mother instinct stunted to a sort of doll play; and Sylvia must have held the same opinion, for she said:

"To Aunt Frances I am a clothespin dressed in a rag."

At a suggestion from Jack or me that it was time we should strike out for ourselves, Mrs. Seabury would weep; and no one could behold her tears and not be moved—those queer little solid-looking tears that seemed to give such pain. They were the jewels that we could not run away from, we three incompetents; not present ease nor gold to come restrained us in that house. Jack and I could have trebled our incomes and increased our comfort a hundredfold by quitting Mrs. Seabury's employ and the shelter of her roof; and Sylvia would have been happier selling lace in a good store.

As for our prospects, Mrs. Seabury was not much past forty and her health seemed perfect, as any one might judge from the exceptionally youthful grace of her carriage. A very trim figure had our extraordinary aunt, and though she dressed cheaply and in sober black there was ever a touch of what Jack called style in her gowns and her head-gear. Something of her beauty still lingered, but her face was thin and deeply lined; and she had a way of compressing her lips with a force that was painful to see. Every muscle used in the act seemed to become individually visible. She habitually held her eyes half closed so that they looked unnaturally long, and from between the lids there came a yellowish gleam. The eyes were violet-blue, flecked with little markings of hazel, which are said not to have been there in the old days, when she was pretty Frances Deering, rich in youth and charm, and with a proper vanity, I trust, so that she might take full profit from the love songs sung to her and the sweet words spoken, in the summer evenings.

CHAPTER II.

It happened in a certain month of June that the three incapables were in a very bad way. Sylvia did not confide in me; I knew not what her troubles were, but it was clear that they were worse than usual. Suppos-

ing them to be pecuniary, I did not venture to intrude. There was nothing that I could do. Jack and I had been speculating on borrowed money for many weeks, and all our ventures had hung fire until the date of the maturing of our obligations had drawn very near, and then the slump had come. The situation verged upon dishonor, and for my own part I saw the judgment of Heaven in it. This was the just and inevitable end of my impossible career.

At one o'clock of an afternoon my stocks touched the point which meant wreck and ruin. A broker tried to instruct me over the telephone as to how I could get more money for margins, and I hung up the receiver in the midst of his remarks. I had a wild notion that Mrs. Seabury might be listening; and indeed, if she had been, it would not have been the first time that a telephone wire had been tapped in her interest.

I went home. It was the day when we were to abandon Philadelphia for our usual summer outing at Cape May. "The beginning of real work," Jack used to call it. At this time of year Mrs. Seabury detached us from our stools in her trust company, and we served her personally, in a special clerical capacity, during the summer. She believed that she was giving us a holiday.

When I returned to the house after conversing with the broker, my aunt called me into her business room, where she sat at a worn old library table, a big black safe towering at her back.

"Arthur," said she, "what are your debts?"

Her tone alarmed me, lest she should have scented the truth. She used what Jack called her "sand-club voice"; soft, said he, but fatal. And indeed I often noticed a sort of sand-club suggestion in my aunt's manner, as if her mind, clothed in an astral replica of herself, were stealthily creeping up behind me with some fell purpose of surprise.

I gave her a list of small debts which I had contracted for that express purpose. It was a scheme invented by Jack,

and used by all three of the incapables with excellent results. If we had said that we had no debts, Mrs. Seabury might have investigated. And besides, as Jack long ago pointed out, our aunt derived a very considerable pleasure from reproving us for minor faults in money matters. We knew by this time just what sort of debts she liked the best, and how big they ought to be. Mine, upon this occasion, ran to twenty-six dollars and some odd cents.

I had an allowance, as the others had, for social expenses, the supposed cost of unavoidable extravagances incident to our position. To specify the amount would be a mere unkindness. The twenty-six dollars stood for my excesses in the gay whirl of Philadelphia high life during the past three months, and I exhibited a voucher for every item except one. It was always well to have forgotten something. And yet in my employment at the trust company I must supervise a fund from which innumerable petty purchases were made, and no voucher was ever missing there. Why was my aunt incapable of perceiving the contradiction? She expressed her sorrow that I could not regulate my affairs with a finer hand, and then she gave me a check to cover my misdoings—the exact sum to a penny; and I thanked her in a sentence which I had prepared beforehand, expressive as the voice of a talking doll—the dwarfed and waxen sentiment that she cared for.

I escaped, and was on the way to my room when I encountered Alice Warden, a young woman who was neither servant nor guest, nor reckoned as a member of the family. She was of good birth, and had been carefully educated, but had fallen into extreme poverty when Sylvia chanced upon her about two years ago. There had been a long debate, and my aunt had made extensive calculations on a pad, and at last the momentous step was taken, and Sylvia had a secretary. It proved an excellent bargain all around. Alice was a faithful and serviceable secretary—for Mrs. Seabury; they worked together almost every evening, and the

cost was very moderate. Sylvia got just what she desired, a girl friend in the house; and Alice had a roof over her head and something to eat. "You won't have any clothes, of course," Sylvia had said to her, "but we can get along by wearing each other's."

It was no gown of Sylvia's that Alice was wearing on this occasion. Here was something new, beyond a doubt, a summer frock and hat as pretty as you'd care to see. And before I had fairly made them out in the dim hall, I was aware of the gleam in the girl's eyes. She seemed bright and wide awake, and for the first time in my acquaintance with her she deliberately invited admiration. She stood in the light from the open door of Jack's room, and faced me with a joyful vanity.

"Aren't they pretty?" said she. "Sylvia helped me make them. I haven't been so happy since I was a little girl. Do I look nice?"

This must be some pleasant form of madness, surely not one to be discouraged, and I gave rein to flattery. Alice, the self-repressed, whom I had always seen so sadly undervaluing herself, and choosing shadow even in the brief moments when the sun shone, had stepped forth suddenly into the light of youth.

"I wish Jack would come," she said, and peeped into his room, which Mrs. Seabury's prompt servants had already set in order for the summer. His things were packed and gone, save for a suitcase which stood upon a table. "How bare it looks," she said. "I wonder if we might go in."

And presently she stood between Jack's mirror and myself, turning from one to the other, and receiving praise from both. I heard a sound, and there stood Sylvia at the door, dressed all in black.

"Come here, you silly girl," said she. "You'll have barely time to dress."

Alice waved a hand to her merrily. "Just one minute more," she said; and Sylvia vanished.

I looked at Alice and saw that her bright mood was waning. She came close to me, and spoke in a low voice.

"Could Sylvia go away?" she asked. "I think it would be best for her if she could be not quite so close to— to Mrs. Seabury, for a little while. Could it be managed? Mightn't she go somewhere else than to Cape May, if only for a week?"

I shook my head.

"I'd be mighty glad if that could be," said I. "There's going to be the biggest kind of a row, and I wish Sylvia could be well away from it. But it can't be done."

"A row?" she asked anxiously. "What do you mean?"

"I can't tell you more," I answered, "and even the little that I have said is in confidence. But there's going to be trouble."

"Yes," said she, "I know it. And you are all so strong."

"Strong?"

"Things move so softly in this house," she said, "but the power behind them is terrible. It is in all of you, not in Mrs. Seabury alone. It is like a great engine; if it breaks, it will crush whatever stands near it—perhaps yourselves. I am so nervous here sometimes that I could scream in the night."

"Alice," said I, "you know something. What is it?"

"I can't tell you," she answered, almost in a whisper, and then: "Oh, let me be as I was a minute ago. Let me go back to it out of this terror. Talk to me as you did before Sylvia came, in her black gown. Tell me that my youth is not all gone in gloom—"

"Alice!" Sylvia called. "You must hurry."

She moved reluctantly toward the door, and stopped upon the threshold.

"Jack hasn't seen me in my pretty things," said she, with childish disappointment.

Something in this scene had struck deeply into my mind. My own troubles and Jack's were quite enough, but now I knew that storms were brewing in another quarter. Alice had not spoken without cause; she had surprised some secret whose nature I could not guess. And indeed my mind was in a state unfavorable for reading mysteries. My

faculties were benumbed. In a month I had not had a clear night's rest; it had become my habit to lie awake for hours, occupied with the most futile efforts to devise some way of safety amid the really serious perils of my situation. The only sleep that did me any good would rush upon me suddenly in the daytime, overwhelming me for only a few minutes and leaving me dazed but refreshed.

I walked to the window and looked out upon the menacing weather. It was a dull, strange, copper-colored day, with thunder muttering from every quarter of the heavens. We should have a deluge soon; and I wondered whether this explained the old black gown that Sylvia had put on. My aunt also had been dressed in black, and doubtless Alice Warden would appear in the same sombre hue. Our party would look about as merry as it felt, and I smiled grimly at the picture. I remember leaning against the angle of the window's embrasure, and the next moment, seemingly, I was startled by a voice. I found myself sitting in a chair in my own room, without the faintest knowledge of how I had come there, or any impression of a lapse of time sufficient for the change of place.

And yet I woke as from a dream, and with a changed view of life. Something seemed to have happened which had relieved me of my distresses; my heart was beating fast with the excitement of it, but I could not remember what it was. I tried to think, and suddenly the one possible occurrence which could solve all problems leaped into my consciousness with a startling clearness. If Mrs. Seabury should die—that was as far as I permitted myself to go with it. I summoned strength of will, and drove the thought out of my mind.

It was Mrs. Seabury's voice that had aroused me. She was speaking to Sylvia in the hall, and seemed to be reproaching her for a lack of spirits. I thought of Alice in her dainty gown. Perhaps if Sylvia had more new things to wear, and fewer old ones made over,

she might disclose some of the gayety which had so amazed me in Alice. It would not have seemed so strange in Sylvia; I never had known any one else who had so great a natural capacity for happiness. Her eyes declared it. They were a glorious blue, and they opened like a child's with delighted eagerness when she was pleased. I could forgive my aunt everything except the repression of the spirit of this beautiful girl whose youth would have been a carnival of light and color, a daintily triumphal progress over flower-strewn ways.

Mrs. Seabury passed on, and Sylvia appeared in my doorway. I think she did not know that I was in the room; certainly she was not addressing me when she spoke.

"I know why *Hamlet* went crazy," she said.

"Sylvia," said I, "what do you mean by that?"

But she protested that she could not remember what she had said, and when I repeated it to her she declared that it meant nothing at all. Long experience with Sylvia had taught me that it was useless to attempt to intrude upon her secrets. She had the manner of a princess at command, a very gentle sort of princess to be sure, but one that knew her station; and I liked her rule too well to be a rebel.

While she stood at my door, Jack

came up the stairs, three at a time. He was always in a hurry, even when he had nothing to do.

"Hello, Sylvia," said he. "In mourning, I observe. Is it for Arthur or for me? We were both slain to-day." He lowered his voice lest Mrs. Seabury should hear. "Wasn't the market

a dream of joy?" he proceeded, entering the room. "But never mind, my boy. I've got a game on hand that will put us on our feet. Anything to write with here? My pen's gone somewhere." He felt in his pockets with a nervous hand and finally drew forth a cigarette case.

"Get me a piece of paper and an envelope, and lend me your pen," said he. "I want to dash off a little note. I'll be back in a second." And he hurried away toward his own room.

"What did he say about the market?" Sylvia asked in a guarded tone, but before I could make any comprehensible reply, Jack had come flying back again.

"Now, then," said he, seating himself at a table, "are we ready?"

I gave him the things that he required, and as I turned away, Sylvia beckoned from the door; and I followed her to Jack's room.

"Tell me about it," said she.

"It's too long a story, Sylvia," I replied, "but the main fact is this; some months ago Jack invented a



*I was on the way to my room when I encountered
* Alice.*

scheme for speculative credit. It was *not* borrowing upon our prospects, but it is possible that Mrs. Seabury may not clearly perceive the distinction."

"And it has failed? You have lost everything?"

"I'm afraid so."

She paused a moment as if weighing the words that she would speak; and then her manner changed, and she raised a warning finger.

"Hush!" she whispered. "Some one is in the hall." And then aloud: "Jack has dropped his hat."

It was a brown Alpine. I picked it up, and gave it to Sylvia, who tried to shake the cigarette ashes out of the brim.

"I wonder if there's a brush here," said she, and lifted the cover of a little compartment on top of the old-fashioned dressing table.

I saw her start back, and a peculiar expression came upon her face, almost like terror. Stepping forward, I looked into the compartment and saw Jack's revolver lying there. Sylvia took it up.

"Look out," said I. "He generally keeps it loaded."

"I shall not hurt myself," said she, handling the weapon somewhat awkwardly, and yet with far more indication of familiarity than I should have expected. "How do you get it open? Jack showed me, but— Ah, now I've managed it."

She had found the spring and had depressed the barrel. There was a pattering rain of cartridges upon the floor; I heard them scurrying toward the dark places with the well-known depravity of inanimate things, and I must get upon my knees and search for them, impelled by that strange anxiety about trifles which torments the victim of exhausted nerves. In this folly I was interrupted by the sound of footsteps, and I arose, expecting to see Jack. Instead I saw the long, thin figure and the bony visage of William Dalton, butler and general slave in my aunt's house. He was carrying a suit case.

"Mrs. Seabury sent me to see about the things, sir," said he. "This is your bag, sir."

"Put it on the table," said I, "and get Miss Leland's and Miss Warden's."

"Very well, sir," he replied. "I think there's no hurry. Mr. Wickham is still here."

Charles Wickham was a confidential man in my aunt's employ, and he had come, as always on the days of our departure, to take the money and securities from the safe in Mrs. Seabury's business room to the trust company's vaults downtown.

"What?" said I. "Hasn't he gone yet?"

"No, sir," responded Dalton. "They're still at it, sir."

Apparently the thought of the bonds and cash that were being handled at that moment was somewhat disquieting to Dalton. I had a corner of my eye upon him, with an idle curiosity, while I put the revolver which Sylvia gave me into Jack's bag, with the cartridges which I wrapped carefully in a bit of paper.

"You needn't wait, Dalton," said I. "Get those things."

Sylvia was already at the door. The butler followed her.

I went to my own room to take a final look around, and when I came out into the hall again, Sylvia was just coming from Jack's room somewhat hastily; and I remember wondering vaguely why she had returned there, but I did not speak of it. Alice joined us and we went downstairs, and Dalton presently came after us, laden with luggage.

"I have yours, sir," said he to me. "I'll go back for Mr. Deering's."

Immediately Jack appeared, with a bustling rush. His yellow hair that knew no parting seemed to be agitated by little hurrying waves, like a cornfield on a squally day.

"I'll get it," said he, and dashed up the stairs, turning midway to call to me: "I'll be with you pretty soon, but I've got to see aunty first. And, I say, old boy, cheer up!"

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. Seabury had yielded to the spirit of the times and had purchased an automobile, a second-hand car as good as new, and a great bargain at the price. One of the Philadelphia papers had printed an extensive account of this transaction, pretending to reproduce the dickering between my aunt and the dealer, with many clever touches of caricature. At any figure within reason the investment must have been excellent, for Mrs. Seabury swooped hither and thither in a business day, and could coin a saved minute into shining dollars. The car was not large, but it would hold five persons at a pinch; and now it waited before the door to take us to the train, with an electric cab in which Dalton and a maid were to ride with the hand baggage.

Sylvia and Alice took seats in the automobile, and I stood beside it. After some minutes Jack appeared, carrying a large package which had the look of a pasteboard box wrapped in brown paper, and this he set on end upon the curb, though Dalton would have put it into the cab with the bags.

"No," said Jack, "I'm going to leave this at the Athletic Club on the way down." And immediately he plunged into the most light-hearted conversation, as if he hadn't a care in the world—and yet with an odd strain of difference from his accustomed buoyancy.

The theme of his remarks was ordinary enough; we were going to have no end of fun that summer, all of us, and he would tell the way of it. As a cheerful prophet, Jack had no equal; he could gild this dross of life so cunningly that it would seem pure gold. He could blow bubbles of the sort that girls delight to watch, gayly tinted trifles that dissolve or float away, quite unregretted, because others take their place. The mere truth, the gross, discourteous facts which women have the fine taste to despise, vanished at Jack's word or hid their ugliness under some disguise of chivalry, serviceable for the moment. The rôle was

usual with him, but the man was changed, I know not how. His conduct was so completely characteristic that I could have mimicked him in advance, and yet it seemed unnatural. He did the expected thing, and I stared at him.

Sylvia should have been the one to respond in the right key to this effusion of high spirits. She had a good will in such matters, and a woman's honesty which owns indebtedness to those who speak of happiness, even when they lie, if it be done acceptably. But Sylvia was not herself; she sat in a corner of the car, quiet, and though she gave the surface of her mind to what was going on around her, the depths were full of an intense pre-occupation.

It was Alice who played opposite to Jack. Her sprightly mood that had so taken me by surprise still prettily transformed her. It was a bit subdued to match the black gown which she wore, but the inward light, the sunshine of the heart, shone undiminished. There was a childlike, pleased expectancy in her eyes quite suitable to the conversation, but as different as possible from her ordinary expression. As I had known her in the last two years, it was her seeming lack of outlook on the future which had most often touched my heart. She had been above the trivialities of discontented youth, but she had shown no eagerness. And I had sometimes seen her, when she thought herself alone, stand still in the manner of one who has opened a door upon a room that is pitch dark, not timid, yet not tempted to go in. Well, the lights were up at last, every candelabrum blazing high with will-o'-the-wisps, and on the banquet table the full cup waiting.

I cannot tell you how strange this simple scene really was, with every person playing out of proper character; something in every breast that was beyond my reading, and no less a mystery in mine; for I was not yet free of that impression with which I had awakened after my odd bit of sleep-walking, that all was well, that some

decisive thing had happened, and even that my own hand had touched the spring of the event.

Our time was running short when Wickham came out of the house carrying a very comfortable fortune in a plain satchel. Upon his heels came Mrs. Seabury, and when I had assisted her into the car, Jack took a seat facing her, and set the big parcel on his knees.

"Why don't you put that into the cab?" said Aunt Frances, and Jack made the same reply that he had made to Dalton.

With that I got aboard, and the car moved. A few words of no importance were exchanged, and then Aunt Frances asked:

"Who is Marjorie Vannard?"

Nobody responded.

"Didn't you hear me, Jack?" asked our aunt, a hint of sand club in her tone.

"Eh?" said Jack, who had fallen into thought. "I beg your pardon, auntie; I didn't catch the name."

"Marjorie Vannard," repeated Mrs. Seabury very distinctly.

"Extremely sorry," said Jack. "Name sounds attractive; but I haven't the pleasure of the lady's acquaintance."

Mrs. Seabury gave the two girls a sidelong look. They shook their heads. She then transfixed me with a glance, but my innocence was proof against it. I had never heard of Marjorie Vannard.

There was a pause, and then Jack said:

"As we're going to stop at the club, we'll make better time if we turn off when——"

"What have you got there?" asked my aunt. "Why do you want to leave it at the club?"

"Oh, it's just some stuff I'll use there next fall," he answered. "It was kicking around the house."

"Where did you get the box to put it in?"

"Place where I have my shirts made," said Jack. "I brought it up to the house yesterday afternoon."

"Did you get the paper there, too?"

"Yes," said Jack, "and the string. Didn't charge me a cent, except a quarter for the box and the paper. Threw in the string."

This feeble attempt at humor was not up to Jack's standard, and I scanned him with anxiety, but if he was having a bad time, he did not show it.

"A place where they make men's shirts," said Mrs. Seabury, in a tone stuffed with the very finest sand. "Do they do anything else?"

"They make men pay for them," said Jack. "That's all."

"Hum!" said Mrs. Seabury softly. "And you don't know Marjorie Vannard?"

"With deep regret, no."

I had become aware that Alice, who sat opposite me, was gently and surreptitiously prodding my foot with her umbrella, whereupon I ceased to study Jack out of the corner of my eye, and looked at the young lady. She seemed much disturbed, and very anxious to communicate a secret message. I had made out that it had some relation to Jack's parcel, and that was as far as I had progressed, when Mrs. Seabury, who had been consulting her watch, closed its case with a snap. At that sound a sort of jumping thrill went round the inside of our vehicle, as if we had all been strung on a copper wire and my aunt's watch had shot a powerful electric current into it.

"We shall not have time to stop at the club," said Mrs. Seabury.

"If you don't want to, auntie," said Jack pleasantly, "it doesn't really matter. I can take the things to Cape May. But what's all this about Miss Vannard? Who is she?"

"A patron of your shirtmaker," responded our aunt, "and an extraordinary young woman in some other ways, I've no doubt."

"The name is on the paper," said Sylvia quietly, and then I knew that that was what Alice had been trying to telegraph.

Jack's mouth fell open just for an instant, but he recovered himself while he was turning the parcel around. The

name was in pencil, and in a small, quaint script, the tail of the M running under the Marjorie, and the V continued across the top of the Vannard; but the accompanying address, though in the same hand, showed no similar eccentricities:

Marjorie Vannard
Steward's Hotel
Philadelphia

"Well, that's very pretty, I'm sure," said Jack, "but if you ask me how it came there——"

"You won't tell," said Mrs. Seabury. "Let us dismiss the subject."

And accordingly it was dismissed until we were aboard the train, when I happened to hear Alice say:

"But, really, don't you know her, Jack?"

I have no doubt that he denied Miss Vannard's acquaintance; he certainly did so to me a few moments later.

"The name must have been on the paper when I got it," said he.

"At the shirtmaker's?"

He looked over his shoulder to be sure that nobody was within hearing.

"That's where the sand club hit me and I fell," said he. "Between you and me, I didn't get the paper there; and if you ask me where I did get it, I'll tell. But why this sudden outburst of frankness? says you. Because you won't ask me, Arthur," and he laid a hand on my shoulder. "You're the sort of good old chap that doesn't do that kind of thing."

He spoke quietly, but with an earnestness which I may properly describe as desperate. It was as if he took his last stand upon that point. In the midst of all his harrowing difficulties he seemed to be most concerned about the appearance of a woman's name on a piece of old wrapping paper; and yet he had just told me in the frankest possible manner that he stood in precisely the same relation to Marjorie Vannard that I did, having no evidence that such

a person existed except the name. The puzzle was beyond my penetration; my exhausted mind refused to consider it.

"Jack," said I, "you'll get no questions from me, and only one small morsel of advice. Don't do anything to-day that you can possibly put off until to-morrow. You're running under too high pressure. Get a night's rest."

He laughed in a rather wild strain.

"Advise her," he said, with a jerk of the head in the direction of Mrs. Seabury. "I'll postpone this trouble if she'll let me. But will she? There's the rub."

At this moment I became aware that Mrs. Seabury desired to speak with me; and presently I was enduring one of those peculiar inquisitions, so stealthy, so baffling, so cruel to the nerves. It seemed to be her purpose to discover what I knew about the cause of Sylvia's altered demeanor; and yet my ignorance plainly pleased her. She would rather I shouldn't know than that I should be able to give her the information, though she ardently desired it; but she wished to be assured that I would tell her instantly if the truth should come to me. Evidently the matter had assumed a paramount importance in her mind; all her faculties were keenly awake as I had seen them in the crises of her vast affairs, but she strove to disguise this fact from me. My muddled wits were not equal to the solving of the puzzle of her attitude; the best guess I could make was that she wished to buy me over to her side in the coming conflict between herself and Sylvia.

"You are very much of a child, Arthur," she said, with irritation. "Do you have any conception of twenty million dollars?"

"It is a character in a fairy story," said I.

"It is what you'll get when I die, if you behave yourself," she said, "that or nothing. And I'm not so well as I look," she added, with startling directness and sincerity.

"If you are ill, auntie," said I, "you ought to rest."

"I've already paid twenty-five dol-

lars for that advice," she responded, with a thin-edged smile, "and that's but half of what the doctor tried to charge me. I should like to know how anybody thinks I'm going to rest. If I had nothing to look after except you children, I'd be busy most of the time." She paused, studying my face. "You mustn't make it harder for me, Arthur," she resumed. "You know what I want you to do. Would you like my word that I will never cut you off? Think about it. Now go, and send Alice to me."

It would have been useless to tell Mrs. Seabury that I could not be bribed to spy upon Sylvia. She would not have known what I was talking about, for bribery in the upper regions of finance is inwoven with existence, and the act had long since ceased to have any moral significance for my aunt. Within a week I had heard her speak of a bribed stenographer in another person's employ as a "good, reliable girl." I held my peace, therefore, and went upon my errand.

Jack was now seated alone in a corner, diligently scribbling calculations upon the backs of envelopes; and when Alice had joined Mrs. Seabury, Sylvia and I were left to entertain each other. When I took my place opposite her, she raised inquiring eyes to me.

"Arthur," said she, after some moments' scrutiny of my countenance, "don't you think you'd better run away?"

I half rose, misunderstanding her.

"Not from me especially," said she. "I mean clear away—to sea, to Eldorado, anywhere that young men go in story books, to regain their self-respect and peace of mind."

"They are disappointed in love first, aren't they?" said I.

"Well, I guess you could manage that. Fall in love with Alice."

"You mean that she would certainly refuse me?"

"Don't you know that she would?" responded Sylvia.

"I suppose so. Why shouldn't she?"

"You perceive no special reason,

aside from your own obvious demerits?"

I shook my head.

"Well, there is one," said Sylvia; "but I'll not speak of it, so you needn't ask me any questions."

"I won't," said I, after a single glance into her eyes; "but I'm going to question you upon another topic, with your gracious permission."

"Granted," said she.

I hesitated. For the first time in my memory I felt constrained with Sylvia. She seemed so changed. But there is a good rule in such matters, that when constraint arises between those who have enjoyed an open-hearted comradeship, it must not be evaded or put away behind a screen of silence.

"Why is it," said I, "that I can't speak to you straight out, as I always have? I am embarrassed; I don't know for what reason. It's too bad, because I want so much to help you, and this seems to stand in my way."

"I have a secret from you," she replied, "the first I ever had, that I cared anything about. Perhaps that's why."

"You can't tell me what it is?"

"No, I can't. And the chief reason is because I don't know the truth."

"It is this which is at the root of the trouble between you and Aunt Frances, isn't it?"

She answered: "Yes."

"Tell me one thing; is it some matter small in itself, which Mrs. Seabury exaggerates? Of course I understand that when Aunt Frances exaggerates a trifling thing, it isn't a trifle any more; it's mighty serious, because she makes it so. The story that she wrecked a national bank in a quarrel about fifty-four dollars is absolutely true."

"This matter," answered Sylvia slowly, "is serious in itself. Nobody could exaggerate it—if it's true at all. It is worse than the wrecking of a bank."

I was at a loss to guess what Sylvia meant, but I knew well enough that the underlying mystery must involve more than money. The thrill of mortal agony was in it, or I was much mistaken.

"Aunt Frances seems alarmed," said I, "but very unsure of her ground. She looks——"

"The trouble with Aunt Frances is that she can't find out how much I know," said Sylvia. "It's really very little, only a hint. And that's why I can't tell you, Arthur, though I long for your advice and sympathy; yes, and your help. If I should tell you, you would believe me."

"Well, and if I did?"

"I don't know what you might do. You would hate that woman, you would look at her with horror. Oh, but this is unjust; I oughtn't to have said it. Wait till I know the truth."

"Will that be long?"

"No," she said; "no. A matter of hours only, perhaps. Yet it may be longer."

"Alice must know something of this," said I, and, at Sylvia's nod of assent, proceeded: "She thinks that you and Aunt Frances should be parted."

"Parted?" echoed Sylvia. "Yes, we shall be parted. But how? What is the way that lies before us, her way and mine? There's the doubt. But, come, let's say no more about it. I have spoken as frankly as I could, Arthur. Have I restored to you the old feeling?"

I looked at her steadily.

"No," said I. "Something has happened, indescribable. You are strange to me."

She cast a glance upon the mirror in the wall beside her, and seemed startled.

"I am changed," she said. "I look haggard."

"It isn't that," I answered. "God knows what it is, my own nervous condition, perhaps, but you seem all new to me, Sylvia. Did you ever meet some one for the first time, in a very ordinary way—I don't mean an ordinary person, but one who surprised and startled you, thrilled you, as if you'd half unconsciously expected him, and had been waiting in excitement? Well, it's like that."

"I have felt that only once," said she, "but——"

"Who was the man?" I asked, with an eagerness that amazed me.

"Stuart Clinton," she answered.

He was a young physician of Cape May who had paid Sylvia some rather marked attention in the previous summer, but with scanty encouragement, as I had thought. At the time I had viewed the matter with indifference, but my memory now rushed back to it headlong.

"You had that—that thrill when you met Clinton?"

"Yes," said she. "And if I believed in presentiments, I should recall the day with awe; but I am not so silly. I believe I had that strange feeling when I first met Doctor Clinton, because he reminded me of my father, as he might have been in youth."

"Presentiments?" said I, catching at the word. "Has Clinton anything to do with your secret?"

"Yes," she answered. "He is in the centre of the storm. But I can't tell you how he happens to be there; I can't say anything about it. Here's Jack."

He came lurching along the aisle, for the train was running at great speed, and steadied himself with a hand upon the back of Sylvia's chair, after missing mine.

"Do you know what you look like?" he demanded. "You look like two sinners discussing the Last Judgment, with about half an hour's grace before it happens."

"Well," said Sylvia, "why not?"

"Speaking of the Day of Judgment," said I softly, "cast an eye upon poor Alice."

Jack glanced uneasily to where the girl was undergoing one of Mrs. Seabury's inquisitions.

"She stands it well," said he. "Evidently she doesn't know much about the subject. Total ignorance is the only shield against the sand club."

"She knows," said Sylvia quietly, "but she won't tell."

At this astounding statement Jack and I exchanged an eloquent glance. The idea that Alice should succeed in keeping anything hidden from Mrs.

Seabury was beyond the acceptance of the human understanding, and we eyed the girl with awe-struck admiration. She was very pale, but she was smiling in the face of her tormentor, sustained by the new light within; and though she had no respite during all that journey, she preserved her secret, and her cheerful courage also. The details of that ordeal I shall never know, but I am well assured that Alice could not have endured it with her ordinary

strength alone. When we had alighted from the train, I noticed that she was suffering from nervous exhaustion so that her limbs trembled, and she clung to Jack's arm, saying to him in a half whisper: "Oh, I am almost dead!" And then she laughed.

Mrs. Seabury heard, and she gave Alice a rather black look.

"The girl is fey," she said to me, and the old Scotch word struck sharply into my mind.

I had been scanning the throng upon the platform with the idea that I might see Doctor Clinton, and yet it was hardly conceivable that he should have come to meet us. He was *persona non grata* to Mrs. Seabury now, although she had once seemed inclined to view him favorably, and he had been received in

the Philadelphia house several times during the winter. Then the doors had been shut against him, with no other cause assigned than this from Mrs. Seabury: "I have learned that Doctor Clinton is not a good man." That settled him, socially, but I happened to know that he had recently called upon Mrs. Seabury in her business room at the top of the trust company's building, presumably to offer evidence against her condemnation of him. The oddest part of this affair was that Clinton had never appealed to Jack or me,



Sylvia was crouched against the side of the house near the window of Mrs. Seabury's bedroom.

although our relations with him had previously been cordial; and I will own that this circumstance had led me to suspect that the misconduct which Aunt Frances had discovered might be serious. Otherwise I should have guessed that his transgression had been merely pecuniary, the owing of money which he could not pay, perhaps, for he was a man of small means.

But how could Clinton be concerned in the very grave trouble that was brewing between Sylvia and Mrs. Seabury? If Sylvia loved him and Mrs. Seabury opposed him as a suitor, it was conceivable that bitterness should arise; yet my mind would not accept that theory, chiefly because I had never seen the slightest sign that Sylvia was in love. Whatever the underlying facts might be, Clinton had now become an object of deep interest to me, and I was conscious of a sensation similar to faintness while I sought for the man's face amongst the crowd in the depot; and I was cheered by his absence without knowing why.

Our destination was the Hotel Eglington, one of the smaller and less expensive places of public entertainment, somewhat old-fashioned, but well situated and comfortable. For the past two years we had had quarters there, with the ocean for our neighbor. The house was built with its two wings thrust forward, making a sort of courtyard before the main entrance, with a bit of green turf in the circle of the driveway, and a tall flagstaff in its centre. Our apartments were in the south wing, on the second story, two suites looking upon the courtyard, and the others extending along the front.

It was about six o'clock when we arrived in a conveyance belonging to the hotel. The western sky, almost to the zenith, was hung with a pall of cloud upon whose front appeared swift lines of fire, darting straight downward, and the dull thunder had a peculiarly heavy quality, shaking the earth. Darkness had come before its time, and the electric lights blazed white at the entrance of the hotel; but the place looked deserted, except for one

parlor where many women sat strangely quiet, as if they feared the coming storm.

At Mrs. Seabury's request I went up to look at the rooms, which were unlocked; and first I entered hers. The sitting room was on the corner, with a broad window toward the court and two others toward the sea. The bedroom was upon the court side, and beyond it was Sylvia's sitting room, with no door between. The windows had been opened, and the curtains drawn aside to air the place, and there was light enough from the court to enable me to see that all was in order.

Immediately Jack entered, carrying his luggage, which he set upon a table by one of the windows that looked upon the sea.

"What are you doing here with that stuff, Jack?" said I. "These are not your rooms."

But he insisted that they were, and that Mrs. Seabury had told him so; and as this error made no difference for the moment, I left him in the rooms, and went out to look at the others. Believing that Sylvia had already gone to hers, I crossed to mine, which were upon the sea front, and separated from Mrs. Seabury's by a passage leading out to the second-story veranda, and a single room, assigned to Alice.

Exhaustion had overtaken me again. I had the sensation of not knowing what I was about, accompanied by a peculiar weakness of the nerves which is akin to terror, but has no assignable object. I sat down in a chair, and held my head in my hands. In a corner of my brain there was a sort of querulous worry as to my health. I felt myself being overpowered for the second time in a single afternoon; if these attacks were to increase in frequency at such a rate, what would be the end? Some form of madness; and suddenly there entered into my mind an unreasoning animosity toward Mrs. Seabury, as if it were she who had driven me to this wretched state.

Then, suddenly, I had a great fear of disaster. There was a hideous crash, and I seemed to be tottering upon some

dreadful brink, clutching wildly at the nearest object. I found myself holding on by one of the curtains at the open window, and my feet were outside upon the veranda. It was as if I had been entering the room. My body was bent double, supported by the curtain in which my hands were twined. I was sobbing, and my heart was bursting in my bosom, while all around and under me the house seemed to be reeling on its foundation.

I became aware of an outcry which seemed to proceed from many different voices widely separated, but its chief source lay toward the courtyard. I ran along the veranda in the rain, which was now falling in swollen drops, and when I came to the rail upon the courtyard side, I saw men running about below me. A peculiar sense of something missing in the scene affected me, and then I saw that the flagstaff had fallen, only a shattered stump remaining upright.

I cried some half-articulate question to the people below, but immediately ceased to give any heed to them. Two voices struck upon my ears; Jack's, calling loudly from the room where I had left him, and Sylvia's, from the veranda, not ten yards away.

Sylvia was crouched against the side of the house near the window of Mrs. Seabury's bedroom. She looked as if she had been violently flung down there, and had struggled to her knees. Her hands were pressed to the sides of her head.

I ran to her, and helped her to arise. She seemed not to hear what I said to her.

"Oh, the flash!" she cried. "I was right here!"

"The flash?" I echoed. "What do you mean? Was the flagpole struck?"

"I was watching the lightning," she said. "I saw the fire fall straight down from the sky."

"Something's happened to Jack," said I. "Can he have been hurt?"

Sylvia was still partially deafened, and seemed not to be able to separate Jack's voice from the general tumult, or to distinguish my words clearly. I

led her through the window, and instantly we were aware of Jack, kneeling upon the floor of the sitting room, and supporting a woman's head with his hands. Nearer to us was Doctor Clinton, also kneeling, and his figure cut off our view so that we saw only the black-gowned form of the woman, prone, but her face was hidden.

Doctor Clinton called over his shoulder to me:

"Seabury, give us some light here!"

The room was dark save for the glow from outside; it seemed darker than when I had entered it before.

"What's wrong?" I asked, springing toward the switch that controlled the lamps. "Has she fainted?"

"Shot," said Clinton, and turned hastily toward Sylvia, as if with some request, his movement disclosing the face which we had not yet seen.

"Alice!" exclaimed Sylvia, in a tone far beyond amazement, thrilling with a desperate incredulity and frantic protest. "Alice!"

She put up her hands to her head, and staggered toward the wounded girl, but would have fallen. I caught her in my arms.

"You thought it was Aunt Frances," I said. "So did I."

Her head drooped, and she uttered a long, sobbing moan. Then, recovering her self-control, she slipped away from me and knelt by Alice.

CHAPTER IV.

Some small defect of the controlling mechanism of the lights baffled me for a moment, and Jack called to me: "That won't work. Try the gas." But I succeeded in turning on the current, and all the lamps glowed. Upon the instant two men entered the room hurriedly, Doctor Bridgman, resident in the hotel, and a clerk whom I had previously seen on duty in the office. The physician's manner showed that he had been summoned; and he carried a black bag in which some hastily gathered implements clinked as he dropped the bag upon the floor. Sylvia was obliged to yield her place. She came toward me

with unsteady steps, her hands clinched, her face white and rigid; the clerk following closely and asking: "Who did it? Who did it?" Sylvia's eyes met mine; she put up a hand to her throat, and a spasm shook her from head to foot. I seemed to understand.

"She is shot in the throat," I whispered. "She cannot speak."

Sylvia inclined her head, and gasped: "Oh, horrible!"

"What does Clinton think?" I asked. "Is it—very bad?"

"She will die!" breathed Sylvia.

"No, no; he can't have said that. He wouldn't have let her hear," I whispered, trying to lead Sylvia away, for she seemed unable to endure the scene. She yielded, for the moment, and we moved toward the hall. Thus we became aware of Mrs. Seabury, who was looking out from Sylvia's sitting room. I saw her shrink and cower as an explosive thunder peal seemed to grind the pieces of the house together.

"What is the matter?" she called, in a high-keyed voice. "Sylvia, where were you?"

Sylvia freed herself from me, and advanced toward Mrs. Seabury, who stood as if upon the defensive, with narrowing eyes.

"Where were you?" demanded Sylvia, halting with a hand upon the railing at the edge of the broad well of the staircase; and there was a moment of silence save for the confused and babbling murmur rising from below, where the excited throng discussed the wrecking of the flagstaff.

"I was here," said Mrs. Seabury, "in your room, looking for you."

"Alice has been hurt," said I.

"Hurt?"

"She has been shot," said Sylvia, still leaning upon the rail, and bending forward, intent. "Some one has tried to kill her."

"Who?" cried Mrs. Seabury sharply.

"We don't know," said I. "She can't speak. She is very badly hurt."

"I'm afraid she did it herself," said Mrs. Seabury. "I have noticed—"

"She did not!" exclaimed Sylvia. "How dare you say so?"

"My dear, be calm," said Mrs. Seabury, very softly. "One might think that you blamed me for this."

"Aunt Frances," I interposed, "Sylvia has said nothing of the kind. She merely asked where you were."

"And I have asked where she was," Mrs. Seabury responded in the same soft tone, "and she has not answered me."

She passed us, and went on into the room where Alice was.

"Sylvia," said I, "this will be bad enough. We mustn't make it worse."

She looked at me in a wild, helpless way.

"Arthur," she said, "do you know anything of this? Did you see—any one?"

"I saw nooody," I replied; and told her hurriedly of my experience.

Meanwhile we had returned into the room, where we stood by the door, somewhat apart from the others. Alice lay as we had first seen her, and Clinton still knelt by her side. He was talking to her in a slow, monotonous voice, telling her to be quiet, not to speak, not to move. Jack, at full length upon the floor, had a hand upon Alice's brow, as if steadying her head upon the pillow. Mrs. Seabury sat upon the edge of a chair, bending forward, watching.

I supposed at the first glance that Doctor Clinton was making an examination of the wound, and I shuddered at the sight; but as the moments passed and Clinton's posture did not change, the truth dawned upon me. He was restraining the hemorrhage by direct pressure; he held the vital current with his finger tip, and must continue to do so until it should obstruct its own channel. He seemed already to show exhaustion; his face was pale and drawn, and he kept moistening his lips.

A little to one side Doctor Bridgman stood, watching his colleague with anxiety which seemed to be tinged with surprise. Presently he bent down and whispered very close to Clinton's ear, and the reply was given with an equal privacy. Thus they exchanged perhaps a dozen sentences.

"What are you saying?" demanded Mrs. Seabury suddenly.

Clinton turned to her a face strangely haggard. If he had been chained to that grim task for hours, he might have looked not otherwise. But his expression changed gradually, and a peculiar detestation entered into it—searching, I might almost say professional, as if he were acutely exercising trained faculties of perception, so that he saw more than would be visible to the common eye. Meanwhile Doctor Bridgman passed quietly around to Mrs. Seabury, and addressed her in a low tone. She did not reply to him, and he turned away toward Sylvia and me.

"Doctor," I whispered, "can you give us any hope?"

He hesitated.

"The situation is very grave, of course," he said.

"Does she know?" asked Sylvia, with a sob. "Is she conscious?"

"Not fully," he replied. "She understands a part of what is said to her. The condition is in some respects unusual; it is one of the innumerable results of shock. She will rally, we hope."

"Has she spoken?" Sylvia asked.

"She has not said anything comprehensible, and of course it is highly undesirable that she should make any effort in that direction."

"Could she write?" said I. "If a pencil were given to her, and a piece of paper were put upon the floor beside her, could she perhaps respond to questions in that way without a dangerous exertion?"

"No, no," said Sylvia. "Don't let her try."

"I have suggested something of the sort," said Bridgman. "Doctor Clinton recommends delay."

The clerk, whose name was Brice, had approached us in time to hear the last words.

"I think it ought to be done," said he.

He had a pencil and a bit of paper in his hand. Doctor Bridgman turned,

and looked attentively at Alice. Then he took the pencil and paper from Brice, and walked around to Clinton, and there was another whispered conference. Bridgman then laid the paper on the floor, backed by a thin book. He put the pencil into Alice's hand, and looked across at Clinton, who lifted up his face, which wore a desperate, tortured expression.

"Doctor Clinton," said Sylvia, stepping forward, "I want you to stop this. You know that it should not be done."

He seemed to make a strong effort to control his voice; then he spoke in a measured, professional tone.

"Doctor Bridgman, I think we ought to say now, in the presence of these witnesses, that the evidential value of what Miss Warden may write will be very questionable."

"I concur," said Bridgman, "but it may lead, perhaps, to something of importance." And after a pause, during which he seemed to wait for Clinton to speak, he proceeded:

"Miss Warden, do not write anything unless you are sure that you understand me. Who inflicted this injury—who shot you?"

It is my own opinion that his question never reached to her intelligence, but that she had already a vague and varying comprehension of what she was expected to do. If she had any realization of her own state, and of what had caused it, she would undoubtedly have wished to tell us all she knew. She had begun to write already, but the pencil constantly fell from her fingers and had to be replaced, and Bridgman found it impossible to guide her hand upon the paper without causing her to cease trying.

"This seems futile," said he, with a glance at Clinton. "I would suggest that——"

"Give me that paper," said Mrs. Seabury sharply; and Bridgman put it into her hand. She looked at it, and then rose as if to have more light; the paper fell to the floor, and Brice, the clerk, picked it up.

"It is of no value," said Mrs. Sea-

bury quietly. "The poor child doesn't know——"

She was interrupted by a cry from Clinton, who called suddenly upon his colleague for assistance. I saw Alice make a spasmodic movement, throwing her head back upon the pillow, and looking up at Jack. She clasped his hand, and tried to draw it to her lips. Her face revealed a fuller consciousness than she had shown before, and she seemed terrified. The next instant the light went out of her eyes.

Clinton had begun to say something reassuring, but before the words were out of his mouth he knew the truth. Death had not come in the expected manner, but he stood amongst us nevertheless, God's messenger, and he stretched forth his hand to Alice. He took her spirit as if it were a gem of an exceeding clearness, and bore it away with him, hidden in a fold of his robe.

Mrs. Seabury rose stiffly and glanced around. Jack had hidden his face in his hands, and his strong body was shaken by sobs. Sylvia, leaning upon a table, looked across at Mrs. Seabury with undisguised hostility. Their eyes met for a moment, and then Mrs. Seabury touched the clerk upon the shoulder. He started as if he had been stabbed.

"Ah!" he gasped. "Eh? Mrs. Seabury, what can I do for you?"

"Where is that paper?" said she. "The piece that she wrote upon?"

The clerk's face showed that he had no memory of what he had done with it, but he dared not say so.

"I gave it to him," said he, and pointed to me; but I immediately disclaimed any knowledge of it.

"Who has that paper?" asked Mrs. Seabury in a loud voice, but no one answered.

She fixed her eyes upon Doctor Clinton for a moment, and her lips were compressed.

"Well," said she at last, "I saw it; and nobody could make out what it meant."

She paused for a moment in thought, and then called sharply to Jack, who came to her, his face wet with tears.

"Tell me how this happened," she said, "and be brief."

He told her how he had come to those rooms, believing them to be his; and at that she broke in to scold him as if he had committed some monstrous and unheard-of folly, whereas a mistake of that kind was in Jack's commonest vein. He heard her quietly, and continued when he had the chance:

"Arthur said that the rooms were not mine, but I still believed that they were. After he had gone, I went into the bedroom to wash my hands, and while I was there somebody came in here. I heard the door close, and looked out, but the sitting room was unlighted, and at first I didn't know whether it was you or Sylvia or Alice. Then she spoke, and I knew. She said: 'I thought Sylvia came up here. She wanted to see me.' My hands were wet; I went back for a towel, calling to Alice that probably Sylvia had gone to her own rooms; and I understood her to ask: 'Aren't these hers?' But she might really have said almost anything else, for there was a nearly constant rumble of thunder. Then I heard her say something about the lights, and I knew she was trying to make the button work, as I had done, and failed.

"There came a squall of wind, and a sharp rattle of rain on this side of the house, after which there was a momentary hush. In the midst of it I seemed to hear a sort of scuffling sound by that window, followed by a faint cry from Alice, who must have run in that direction. The pistol shot came almost instantly afterward. It was not in the room; I am perfectly certain of that, although I imagined subsequently that I smelled powder. But the shot came from outside. It was not nearly loud enough to have been fired within. And the next instant it was obliterated, with every other earthly sound, in that crash of thunder which was ten times the loudest noise that ever I heard in my life.

"I was deafened, and half stupefied, and when I staggered out into the other room and found Alice lying on the floor, I thought she had been stunned.

Oh, poor girl, it was the blood that let me know——"

He paused a moment, struggling to regain control of his voice.

"I went out into the hall," he said, "and called over the rail to Brice, who happened to be right at the foot of the stairs, but I didn't tell him what was the matter. I merely asked him to get Doctor Bridgman. He said: 'What is it? Was anybody struck?' and I answered no, and turned back toward the room. There stood Doctor Clinton, right by the door.

"'Good Lord!' I said. 'How did you get there?' And he told me that he had been in the hall when I came out, but I hadn't seen him, because I was too excited, I suppose. I said: 'Go in,' and he did so; and he thought at first that it was you, Aunt Frances. He spoke your name, and I said no, that it was Alice. And when he asked me how it had happened, I told him that she had been shot by some one on the veranda. He was trying to do something for her when Sylvia and Arthur came from the bedroom."

Jack had begun his recital somewhat hurriedly, and in a low tone, as if it were his object to give Mrs. Seabury the facts in the hastiest manner, but he had spoken louder and with more particularity when he perceived that all were listening. At the close the whole company stood stock-still, the two doctors beside the body, and Sylvia leaning upon the table, very pale and intent.

"This seems to make it plain enough," said I. "Somebody was hiding behind that curtain, and was discovered by Alice."

"Some thief," said Mrs. Seabury, evidently relieved; and indeed I also felt an easement of the strain after hearing Jack's story.

But it is the natural duty of a clerk in a hotel to cast suspicion upon any story of thieves, and accordingly Brice interposed a word.

"I don't see why a thief should shoot after he got outside," said he. "According to Mr. Deering, the shot came from the veranda. A thief wouldn't

have stopped to fire back into the room; he would have kept right on running, once he was clear."

"Unless it was some one whom the young lady knew," suggested Doctor Bridgman; "perhaps a servant who was here last year."

"There isn't a male servant in the house who was here last year," said the clerk, "nor a woman, except in the kitchen."

After a moment's silence, Doctor Bridgman, who seemed a somewhat argumentative person, said: "As to getting away, he must have gone down the outside stairs, and have been seen by a lot of people. There was a rush toward the windows after the flagpole was struck, and the man would just about have been caught halfway down from the upper to the lower veranda. Somebody must have come out through the windows of those rooms on the ground floor, along the ocean front of this wing."

"Well, I don't know," said the clerk. "I doubt if he—the——"

"Murderer," said Sylvia, in a soft, deep tone, and the air seemed to thrill to that awful word as if it had been tolled from the throat of a bell.

I saw Mrs. Seabury's head go down into her shoulders, and she cast one haggard glance toward the dark form upon the floor, with the white cloth over the face.

"I was going to say," continued Brice, "that I don't believe he risked it to go down those stairs. He may have dodged in through the passage that leads from the upper veranda to the hall."

"I should have thought Doctor Clinton would have seen him," said I. "You must have been pretty well up the stairs, doctor, by that time."

"Yes," said Clinton, "I should suppose so."

"It's queer I didn't see you," said the clerk, putting a hand to his forehead. "When did you come up the stairs?"

"A few minutes before this happened," responded Clinton quietly.

"And you saw nobody?" said I.

He shook his head.

Brice seemed to fall into a brief dream, and then awake.

"What possible motive——" he began, and then his voice faded away. "Well," he resumed, "this will have to be reported. I don't believe a soul in the hotel, except ourselves, knows anything about it now. The smashing of the flagpole took everybody's attention."

"Arthur," said Mrs. Seabury, moving toward the door, "I want you to come with me. And Sylvia——"

"I shall stay here," said Sylvia, "with Alice."

"Doctor Bridgman and I will remain," said Clinton, "and Miss Leland, of course, if she desires, until the coroner comes. I think the others would better go."

"Yes," I assented, and then spoke for a moment privately with Jack, advising him to go to his own rooms, which were beyond mine, on the ocean side.

"I'll join you as soon as I can," I whispered, and he made a sign of acquiescence.

"But we haven't looked about much," objected Brice.

"There's nothing here," responded Doctor Clinton, "no weapon, no trace. Take my advice and report this quietly, as quickly as you can."

"Arthur," said Mrs. Seabury, somewhat sharply; and I followed her out of the room.

We went to Sylvia's apartments, and Mrs. Seabury immediately called Philadelphia by telephone, giving the residence address of the lawyer who was usually her counsel in affairs that fell within the scope of criminal statutes. His name was Holman Cushing, a man very well known, but of a somewhat sinister repute. Mrs. Seabury showed considerable nervousness while waiting for the connection, and questioned me spasmodically about Sylvia. What was she doing on the veranda when I had found her there, after the lightning flash? What had she said? And suddenly, at the sound of a voice along the wire, she waved her hand to me with a peremptory gesture.

"Go!" she cried. "Leave me alone."

CHAPTER V.

Porters were putting my trunks into my room as I passed on the way to Jack's; and when he had unlocked his door and admitted me, I saw that all his luggage had been delivered. Upon the table in the middle of his sitting room stood his suit case, closed, and a big pasteboard box, open, and disclosing a miscellaneous collection of sweaters, rubber-soled shoes, and much-worn clothes.

"So that's your parcel," said I. "Where's the wrapper?"

"I don't know," he answered. "I threw it somewhere."

There was no sign of the paper which had borne the name of Marjorie Vannard. Upon the table were some bits of white paper, torn, and he was running over some letters hastily.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"You spoke of paper just now," said he. "Let me show you a small piece." And he drew from his pocket what looked like a leaf from a pocket blank-book of some sort. I held it in the light of the single electric bulb which was glowing, and saw that it was scrawled upon with writing in pencil, the words running off the edges in a blind fashion as shown in this copy:

*It was a
It was Judge
I must tell
name I thought
indeed like*

"You see what it is," said he. "What do you make of it?"

"This is the message that Alice tried to write," I responded, "but it means nothing. And if it did—you saw her; you know that she was not really conscious."

He uttered a groan, and dashed the back of his hand against his eyes.

"Jack," said I, "if a man may ask such—"

"I know," he interrupted, "I know what you would say. She seemed to care for me. Well, I cared for her, too, God knows! If we had led sane lives, any of us, I might have loved her. But I'll tell you the most that ever was between us, just one gleam of tenderness, and no more. This morning, quite early, I happened to be alone with her at the house, and she was so sad! I tell you, Arthur, it was unbearable to see a young and pretty girl so smothered and drowned in that wretched atmosphere. I walked up to her and put my arm around her shoulders, and I talked to her. I hardly know what I said, but only that I wouldn't have her so unhappy, and that somehow, in the face of the devil and all his emissaries on earth, I would make her life bright. I didn't speak of love; not a word of it. I said: 'You shall be happy, and I'll make you so.' And if I'd been burning up with love for her, I'd have said the same thing and no more. Men offer their love with promises of happiness—the men's happiness, their own, ninety-nine times in a hundred. Well, when I love, I'll bring the woman's happiness first, both my hands full of it, as much as I can carry. And my love shall be mentioned afterward, if the lady cares to hear of it."

He stretched out his hand to me, and I clasped it. The tears were running down his face.

"You made her happy for one day, Jack," said I. "You kept your word as long as she lived."

"Well," said he, "she's gone, poor girl, and we're here, and in a mighty bad place, too. Have you a scrap of Alice's writing anywhere?"

"No, not a word."

"She didn't write much," said he, "except with the typewriter, for Mrs. Seabury. They'll find it hard to get samples, even if they try; and they may not try. However, I'm destroying a few little notes that I happen to have."

"But why, in Heaven's name?"

He took the notebook leaf from my hand.

"How do you read that?" he asked, pointing to the first line.

"It was U," I replied.

"Now look at this," said he, and showed me a brief note from Alice in which occurred this line: "It was after you went away."

"She always made an A like that, open at the top," said Jack. "Good Lord! Look at this."

He showed me in another note the words, "I saw Arthur," and the A was almost precisely similar to the character which I had supposed to be U in the murdered girl's last writing.

"I tell you," whispered Jack excitedly, "that's an A, but it will pass for a U, and that will let everybody out."

"You don't mean to suggest that she would have written my name!" I cried aghast.

"Other people might think so," said he. "We won't give them any help in forming that conclusion. Poor Alice didn't know what she was writing, and that's a fact. It's lucky that the thing is no worse than it is. But if you say so, I'll burn this right now."

"We can't do that!"

"I can do it," said he, "if it's going to help you out of any trouble."

"But what possible motive—"

He interrupted me.

"Arthur," said he, "we must look this tragedy in the face. Alice was murdered. Do you have the faintest idea that it was done by a thief, by somebody who was getting in there to steal?"

"No," said I, "Brice settled that theory."

"Then it comes right down to us. You can take your choice of the four, my boy, for nobody else was about."

Was it Aunt Frances? Was it Sylvia? Was it I?"

"There's Clinton."

"Clinton was on the stairs. And besides——"

A hand tried the door softly, and then rapped with loud, firm strokes. The color went out of Jack's face, and he looked suddenly over his shoulder in the direction of the windows. Then he stepped toward the door, and called: "Who's there?"

I did not hear what was said by the person outside, but Jack evidently recognized the voice. He ran back toward me.

"It's Len Quinn," he whispered. "What brings him here so soon?"

Leonard Quinn was Cape May's chief of police. Jack repeated the name softly, as if the sound might help him think what he should do, and I saw him form a hasty decision.

"Arthur," he whispered, speaking with extraordinary rapidity, and seeming to take my answers from my eyes, "you don't doubt me? You know I didn't do this thing? Good! But there's something that might get me into trouble. Will you help me? Yes. Then go out through that window. Take what you find there; take it away. Hide it. Don't let any one see it."

He pushed me in the way I was to go, and then started toward the door. I stepped outside, into the night. The rain had ceased; the wet boards gleamed in the light from an electric lamp upon a pole in the courtyard. There was no one on the veranda except myself, and I saw its floor, as bare as my hand. A glance was enough to show me that there was nothing at all for me to hide. Bewildered, I stepped back into the room, and at the same moment the chief of police entered by the door.

Jack turned, and when he saw me standing there, and read the vacant look upon my face, he gave a sort of gasp, and leaned weakly upon the back of a chair, bowing his head.

The chief greeted us both briefly, but with the engaging cordiality of his race.

We had known him well in past summers. He gave me only a glance and then regarded Jack intently in his own peculiar way. Quinn had an egg-shaped head, with the greatest breadth at the jaw, and when he scrutinized any object with especial care he slowly tilted his face until a corner of his chin was pointed in the required direction. It was impossible to resist the suggestion that he was looking with his jaw rather than with his eyes.

"A very sad affair," he said. "But you're taking it rather hard, Mr. Deering, for a man of your spirits."

"I ought not to think of myself," responded Jack. "Still, if you come to that, I'm in an unfortunate position."

"How so?"

"I was alone with her," said Jack.

"But you haven't been alone since," returned Quinn, "you haven't been out of Mr. Seabury's sight."

Evidently he had been told that I had gone with Jack to his room, and it seemed best to let him think so, for the time.

"It's a question of the weapon," Quinn proceeded. "Miss Warden was shot with a revolver, and it's not upon the scene. The guilty party took it with him—or her, as the case may be. But you haven't had any chance to dispose of a revolver. By the way, do you own one?"

"Yes," said Jack.

"Where is it?"

Jack looked perplexed.

"I don't know," he said. "I can't remember packing it. Maybe it's in one of my trunks."

"Couldn't be in your grip?" suggested Quinn. "I hope not; especially if you carry it with one empty shell under the hammer, as so many men do."

"It isn't in my grip," Jack said. "You can look. I'd rather you would."

"Hold on," said I. "The revolver is in that bag, but Mr. Deering doesn't know it. He forgot to pack it; he left it in his room. I put it into the bag myself, and neglected to tell him."

"Oh, I see," said Quinn, and turned to Jack. "So the revolver is there yet? You haven't taken it out?"

"I haven't seen it at all," Jack answered; "I know nothing whatever about it."

The chief walked to the table, and laid hands upon the suit case, but did not immediately open it. He touched the clasps, which were unfastened, and looked up at us in order to be sure that we had marked that fact; he focused a corner of his chin upon me, and then rolled his face slowly and pointed the other corner at Jack.

"I started to open the grip, but didn't," said Jack. And in reply to Quinn's question as to where this had been done he said: "In the carriage coming up from the station."

"Yes," said I, remembering, "I saw you do it. You were going to put away a magazine that we had had on the train; but Sylvia asked you for it."

The point of Quinn's jaw viewed me earnestly. I saw the light shine on the small round spot where his beard was so scanty that the area showed bare even in the midst of a close shave. There was one on each side, and Jack and I had long ago decided that these were the man's extra visual organs.

"Miss Leland prevented him from opening this bag?" said Quinn, vaguely interrogative.

"I don't know that," said I. "She asked him for the magazine; that's all."

"Just happened to," said Quinn. "I see." He opened the bag, and slowly took out the contents.

The revolver was not there.

This discovery produced a greater physical effect upon me than any other incident of the tragedy. I had felt grief and horror when Alice died before my eyes; my emotion at that time had been seizing and powerful, but my bodily part had shown no weakness beyond what is usual. On the contrary, however, the sudden recognition of the fact that the revolver was gone from that bag went over me like a wave of nausea, and the sweat broke out upon my face.

"Well," said Quinn, with satisfaction, "I guess we've worked down to the weapon. When we find who got it out of this grip, we'll be pretty warm,

I should say. You're sure you put it here?"

I answered "yes," in a voice so sick and weak that Quinn's chin came up quickly in my direction.

"You're feeling bad," said he. "Well, I don't wonder. You were all pretty fond of that girl, as well you might be; and all kind to her, too. I noticed last year how Miss Leland treated her like a sister, and I can hardly imagine anything having come between them."

"Nothing ever did," said Jack.

"Well, that's good," responded Quinn. "And now let's see if we can get down to anything in the matter of this gun. Who knew it was there?"

I mentioned Dalton's name, but I was ashamed to seem to cast suspicion upon him, and in endeavoring to avoid doing so I told a lame story, weak and insincere. I did not dare to say that Sylvia had been in Jack's room at the time, for Quinn's manner of speaking about her had disquieted me. And now he began to question me directly as to Sylvia's whereabouts and possible knowledge of the weapon, till I lost my temper in a silly, feverish fashion, and called him to account for presuming to suspect her.

"Why," said he, in mild protest, "you're suspecting her yourself."

I contradicted him with considerable vehemence, but he was quite unmoved.

"Sure, you are," said he. "Haven't you carefully kept still about her being in that room when you put the gun into that grip?"

"Why do you say she was there?" I demanded.

"Because I've just been talking with her," he responded blandly, "and she told me so herself."

My nerve was utterly gone now, and Quinn, in the manner of a skillful pugilist, gave me no chance to recover. He questioned me with great adroitness, forcing me to admit that the relations between Sylvia and Mrs. Seabury had been disturbed of late, and that there was a mystery in which Alice seemed to have a part; but I insisted that the affection between Alice and Sylvia had seemed even stronger

than before, and upon this point Jack came to my aid with strong assertions.

"Maybe so, maybe so," Quinn assented, "but it's not important."

"Not important!" I exclaimed.

"No," said he, "not very. The chances are that nobody's feeling toward Miss Warden had anything to do with this case. She was in Mrs. Seabury's room, which was almost dark. She was dressed simply in black, and so was Mrs. Seabury, who is as near of a size with her as we could wish, and very youthful in figure and carriage. Besides, the person who fired that shot wasn't particularly cool, of course; he or she expected to find Mrs. Seabury there, and almost anybody would have looked like her. If you ask me what I think of the case now, I'll tell you that I believe the shot was intended for Mrs. Seabury, and was fired by some one who had quarreled with her, or had some special, urgent reason for desiring her death. At any rate, that's the direction in which I'm looking for a motive just at present. And, therefore," he added, with great earnestness, "if you have any influence with Miss Leland, you'll urge her to tell me at once what's gone wrong between her and your aunt. She has refused to tell me, and so has Mrs. Seabury. There was a deadly serious quarrel, and that's all I know at present. Now, you want to remember that there's a terrible lot of money back of you, and that anybody who can put any of you in worse than you're in now will do it, for the sake of the plunder. So don't make any mistakes at the start."

CHAPTER VI.

There was a rap at the door, and Chief Quinn exchanged a glance with Jack, who nodded. The chief stepped to the door and opened it, in such a way that he could not be seen from without. Charles Wickham entered, with a pale, set visage, and the manner of one who has nerved himself for an extremely unpleasant encounter. After a single glance at Jack and me, he turned hastily, and started with sur-

prise at sight of Quinn standing with his back against the closed door.

"Your man told me that Mrs. Seabury was here," said he.

"Mr. Wickham, if I remember right," responded Quinn. "My man must have made a mistake."

The words were not intended to deceive, however. It was easy to infer that a policeman stationed somewhere in the hall had been told what to do with all persons inquiring for Mrs. Seabury or any other member of our party. Whoever they might be, Quinn had desired to question them at once.

"When did you come down?" he asked.

"On the second express," answered Wickham.

He had turned away from Quinn, toward me. I was looking into his face as he spoke, and I received the strongest possible impression that the statement was a lie; whereat I was extremely surprised, for several reasons. The train usually called the second express left Camden forty-five minutes later than the one which we had taken, and ran not quite so fast. There was no other within the period, and so the man's mere presence seemed to prove his story; yet if ever I saw falsehood written on a human countenance, it was on Wickham's; and this was the more remarkable because he had so hard a face to read, bloodless, blue-jowled, with singularly cold and steady eyes. But I had certainly caught him off his guard for an instant.

"On time?" said Quinn, and consulted his watch.

Wickham nodded over his shoulder, and addressed me, asking for Mrs. Seabury. I told him where I had last seen her, and he said that he was charged with an important matter of business which required her attention, whereupon I spoke by telephone with Mrs. Seabury, who was still in Sylvia's apartments.

"I will see Wickham," said she, "and I want you to come with him."

Meanwhile, Quinn had been questioning Wickham, who had declined to reveal the nature of his business with

Mrs. Seabury, but had shown no reticence in regard to other matters, speaking freely of his errand at our house in the early afternoon.

"I suppose you carry barrels of money in the course of a year," said Quinn. "Do you go armed?"

"I do," responded Wickham.

"Would you mind letting me see the gun?"

"Not at all," said Wickham, and he gave Quinn a revolver of ordinary pattern.

"Clean as a whistle," said Quinn, examining the weapon. "Empty, too."

"It has never been loaded," said Wickham. "The bluff is as far as I'll go. I've never had the least experience with firearms. I'd be more likely to shoot myself than anybody else."

Quinn dropped the revolver into a pocket of his coat.

"I'm making a collection," he said. "Only temporary. I'll give it back to you after a while. We haven't found the bullet yet."

"It is not in the wound?" I said, and he responded no, but that it must be in the room, which was then being searched.

I cast an uneasy glance at Jack. His revolver was of a French model very rare in this country, carrying a bullet that could not fail to be recognized. He had bought it in a pawnshop at what seemed a great bargain until we discovered that the handful of cartridges which the obliging pawnbroker had given him were probably the only ones in Philadelphia that could be used in the weapon. But if Quinn's statement made any impression upon Jack's mind, he showed no sign of it.

Quinn made no objection when I mentioned Mrs. Seabury's wish; indeed, I thought he seemed pleased to be rid of us so easily, that he might have a private word with Jack. For my own part, I scented peril. Jack was not remarkable for discretion in emergencies; he had a highly imaginative style of conversation, and it was often difficult to distinguish his theories from his facts. If he had formed any opinion about the crime, he might disclose it

to Quinn in such a blaze of fancy as would light up a large number of events which had never happened. Knowing this so well, I tried to make some sign of caution, but Jack failed to apprehend my meaning, and I spoke plainly.

"Jack," said I, "it seems to me that we have talked enough. I wouldn't say another word, if I were you."

"I can't," he replied, very simply. "I've told all I know."

"You must have an opinion," I persisted, attempting to anticipate what Quinn would say after I was gone.

"No," he said, "I haven't thought much. I feel—sorry. The cruelty of it——" He turned his face away from us quickly, and walked toward the window with bowed head.

When I went out into the hall with Wickham, I saw Doctor Clinton coming from the room where Mrs. Seabury had installed herself. He left the door ajar, and signed to a waiter who was leaning against the rail of the stair well that he should enter. Clinton looked extremely troubled; he seemed about to address me as we drew together, but suddenly quickened his steps and passed without a word, merely raising his arm stiffly in a sort of salute as he hurried toward the stairs.

It was the waiter who opened the door when I knocked; and I saw Mrs. Seabury at a table in the middle of the room, eating her dinner. She eyed us over the edge of a glass from which she drank a sip of an excellent bottled spring water, an extravagance which I had often heard her excuse in a manner highly amusing. At a word from her the waiter withdrew, presumably to take up his former station as a guard; and I wondered that the trusty Dalton was not upon this service.

"How did you get here?" she said to Wickham.

He made the same reply as before, and stopped in the midst of it to swallow air. "I came down"—a gasp—"on the second express."

It was so poor a lie that I expected Mrs. Seabury to nail it on the instant, but she seemed to pay no attention. She took another sip of spring water.

"What for?" she said. Whereupon Wickham told a strange story, in a manner which I shall not attempt to reproduce. He had a natural gift of brevity and directness, which had doubtless been improved by training in Mrs. Seabury's service, but it deserted him in this emergency, and he gave the most tangled and tail-foremost account that ever I had heard. The facts, however, were extremely simple.

Wickham had taken the money and securities from the house to the trust company, and had turned them over to Gilbert Norris, treasurer, who was a sort of plenipotentiary for Mrs. Seabury. The bonds and stocks were poured from Wickham's satchel upon a table; they were in little separate packets, some fastened with rubber bands, others in envelopes or with strips of paper pasted around them. Norris had begun to check them up in accordance with Mrs. Seabury's list which accompanied them, and had already passed forty Illinois Central bonds when a secretary who was present pointed to them as they lay on the table and said: "Those look queer to me."

The bonds were folded, and enclosed in a yellow envelope with its ends slit open and the adhesive lappet pasted down. The envelope was not quite long enough to cover them, but only a very little of the contents was visible; and the secretary must have had a good eye. Norris opened the packet, and found that it contained forty pieces of paper of the proper size and general appearance, but of no value. The missing bonds were worth, at the market, about forty-one thousand dollars.

Wickham offered no explanation of this fraud, except to intimate that it might have been accomplished some time ago, for the supposed packet of



"Have you had dinner?" she asked.

bonds had not been opened at the house, but had merely been listed from the typewritten memorandum on the enclosing envelope. As he had received it, so he had delivered it to Norris. The satchel had not been out of his hands for an instant, and had not been opened on the way to the trust company.

Mrs. Seabury received this news with an astonishing equanimity. On previous occasions, when she had been the victim in minor cases of theft, I had seen her pace the floor in a cold fury, dreadful to witness; and "I have no mercy for thieves" was one of her customary sayings. It amazed me, therefore, to behold her calm, and Wickham seemed to be dumfounded by it, terrified, indeed, as if he thought that she was hiding her true feeling

from him because she held him guilty, and was preparing secretly for his destruction. The reason which she gave, however, was natural and creditable.

"In view of what has happened here," said she, "I can't attend to this matter. I must leave it to Mr. Norris. Go back and tell him so."

"Mrs. Seabury," he said, in a voice full of desperation, "you don't think I did this!"

"I don't know who did it," she responded coldly. "If you didn't, you have nothing to fear. As for the lie you told me, I shall pass it over. So don't worry about that."

"The lie?" said he, choking on the word.

"Yes. You said that you came down on the second express. You didn't. There's been some sort of cloudburst, and the tracks are flooded. I don't remember where, but the second express is on the other side of it," and she made a gesture toward the telephone to indicate her means of information. "As there's been no through train in since ours, you must have come on that; you'd have had time to catch it, I should think. And you've been keeping out of sight because you didn't dare to face me with your news."

"Mrs. Seabury," he gasped, "you understand—"

"Perfectly," said she. "You have been frightened out of your wits, and I know why; so we won't waste time talking about it. But I will remind you that a better countenance would be safer just now. There's something worse in the wind than the theft of my bonds. Remember that."

Wickham's face seemed to me to turn green, and when he spoke, his lips moved strangely, as if they were partly paralyzed.

"That poor girl; I—I barely knew her. I—"

"The person who shot her may not have known her at all; not at the moment," said Mrs. Seabury. "The room was quite dark, I am told. It would have been easy to mistake her for somebody else—me, for example. And if any one who had a special reason to

fear me happened to be lurking about, it would be unfortunate."

He raised his right hand, the fingers contorted, and uttered some half-intelligible adjuration of innocence. I had never seen the thing done in real life before, and it impressed me strangely as a copy of the stage.

"I guess you didn't do it," said Mrs. Seabury, "but you'd better try not to look as if you did. There are eyes everywhere. Now go. Get back to Philadelphia as soon as you can, and give my message to Mr. Norris. That's all."

At this, Wickham gave an extraordinary exhibition of reserve force; he pulled himself together as I would not have thought possible, and made a very creditable exit from the room.

"Aunt Frances," said I, "can it be possible that Alice was mistaken by whoever—"

"For me? Perhaps."

"Chief Quinn thinks so."

"Yes," said she. "I saw him for a minute. That's where I got the suggestion."

"Do you believe it?"

"I don't know," she replied, "but it's a good idea, and capable of extension. I don't see why she couldn't just as well have been mistaken for Sylvia. Fortunately, they were dressed alike."

"They were," said I, "but what of that?"

She leaned across the table toward me, and spoke with some intensity, of a cold sort.

"The public," she said, "the rabble, the wretched newspapers. They'll seize upon this crime because I'm concerned in it, I and my money. They'll demand a victim. Well, we will make the possible list just as long as we can, and sacrifice somebody from the bottom of it, if we have to. Do you remember the old Russian story of the sleigh pursued by wolves, and how the people in it threw out a child, and the wolves stopped to eat it? Now, my dear boy, who is in the sleigh at present? Who is to be saved?"

"I suppose you mean Jack," said I, "but—"

She interrupted me with something like contempt.

"Jack! What nonsense! Will any sane person believe that he committed such a deed in such a way? What did he do with the weapon? Did Alice show resentment toward him? Or any fear of him? You saw as well as I. She died trying to kiss his hand."

"Of course I don't believe he did it, auntie," I protested. "Back of all those matters that you mention, and far more important than any of them, is the man's character as we know it. I wouldn't believe that he did such a thing if I saw him. I couldn't; it isn't in me to give up my faith in Jack. I was thinking only of what you said about the public. The man who was on the spot is always suspected."

"But was he on the spot?" said she. "Where did the person stand who fired the pistol?"

"Jack says——"

"Wait!" she interposed. "Does Jack suspect any one?"

"No."

"You are sure of that?"

"Positive."

"Then he's telling the truth," said she. "He's not shielding anybody. He says the shot was not fired in the room, and he certainly must know. The sound would have been very different. Then the spot that you have mentioned is not in the room; it's on the veranda, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, who was there? Who is the only person now known to have been on the veranda?"

"Not Sylvia! I won't hear of it."

"You'll hear a great deal of it, I'm afraid," said she, and shut her lips as if they were two pieces of metal.

"But Sylvia was on the other side of——"

"When you found her," responded Mrs. Seabury. "You were at your window, but you did not hear the shot. You went out immediately after the crash of thunder. Would Sylvia have had time to run around the corner of the house?"

I was silent.

"Did you see anybody else?" she continued.

"No," said I, "but some one might have run in through the passage——"

"Doctor Clinton was at the head of the stairs."

"Or have gone down by the outside stairway," said I. "Undoubtedly that was what really happened."

"Well," said she, "that path is still open, so far as I know. I cannot learn of any one who was on the lower veranda at the time. But, mark my words, people will be found—they always are—who did not see anybody descend. They may not have been looking; they may not even have been there, or anywhere about, but they will appear with their evidence just the same. And Sylvia will stand in a very serious position."

It came into my mind that Quinn already suspected her, and that I had increased her peril by a very serious blunder. I was aghast, and my face must have revealed my state.

"Now, my dear," said Mrs. Seabury, "don't worry. Sylvia shall be saved. I thought it best to show you plainly where she stands, so that you might yield more readily to my direction. Sylvia is as safe as I am, because I will protect her. It will cost a lot of money, Arthur, but I shall not begrudge it, for Sylvia."

"What will you do?"

"I will so ensnarl this affair," said she, "that there will not be two people on earth who hold the same opinion about it. Every wolf shall have his own particular prey—and not know what to do with it, either. It will be a lesson for you, Arthur; for the public is always your enemy, no matter what you're doing. Confuse them, blind them, divide them."

She paused upon this statement with a considerable relish, and then proceeded, as I thought, with less sincerity:

"You know how fond I am of Sylvia; I have always treated her like a daughter. I am doing this for her. Some day you must make her understand that, but not now. I mean, don't

tell her what I'm doing; just let her know how I feel toward her."

I stared at her blankly. The revolutions of her mind were beyond my ken.

"Aunt Frances," said I, "you can't mean that you will deliberately cast suspicion upon anybody—that poor creature, Wickham, for instance."

"You talk like a child," she returned. "What will everybody else be doing? What is every idiot in this hotel talking about, at this instant? What is every newspaper correspondent in Cape May digging and delving and scribbling for, as we sit here? Shall we be idle in the midst of this? I think not. Self-preservation is the first law of nature."

I felt that numbness of the mind which has so often come over me while trying to discuss a moral issue with Aunt Frances. There was something between us like the gulf that divides unallied races. We might agree upon a course of action, but never upon a sentiment. The curse of cosmopolitan communities was on us, the impossibility of a common feeling. It was useless, therefore, to argue toward an unattainable goal.

"There's no doubt," I said, "that Sylvia—all of us, indeed—will have to face a great deal of unpleasantness, but we don't want to try to escape it by pushing Wickham into the fire."

"Do you fancy that I will delegate the management of this affair to you three children?" said Mrs. Seabury. "I shall not be so foolish; and you must be careful to consult me in regard to everything you do or say. As for Wickham, I wasn't thinking of him; he may have an alibi, for all that I know. But the other one hasn't."

"Who is it?"

She shook her head, and slowly shifted her glance downward to the table, which she scanned with a calculating eye.

"Have you had dinner?" she asked. "I suppose not. Perhaps you might make out with part of mine."

"I'm not hungry—"

"Then why waste money on a sep-

arate dinner? Call in the waiter from the hall, and have him bring another plate."

CHAPTER VII.

You may have watched a little girl feeding her doll, and possibly you will have observed that the participation of the doll is very crudely imagined. It is the mother's part which is best played and chiefly relished by the performer. The bits of crockery are arranged and rearranged with an emphatic anxiety, the lone lump of sugar is transferred from one plate to another till the resources of the child's ingenuity are exhausted, and then the doll has satisfactorily dined; for the object of it all was a dream of transacting the affairs of a family, with an agreeable sensation of solicitude. This having been enjoyed, the meal is over. Not otherwise was I fed and tended by Aunt Frances, and though I ate next to nothing, she smiled contentedly at the close. So far as she was concerned, I had had my dinner.

This was in part her individual nature, but its basis is common to the practical, and a great factor of success in life; for to be practical, as we apply the word, is to have the power to take the business of one's fellow men out of their hands, and do it very ill with an enormous satisfaction. The spark of kindness, of tenderness, indeed, was my aunt's own, but the childish imagination and extreme ease of self-deception seem to be necessary elements of the genius for industrial control. I have heard captains of finance at my aunt's table, over the third glass of wine—and that means men of prime importance, or they would not have got so much—dreaming aloud of their service to the public; and once when we had a great biped of the Food Trust there, I found some grains of fancy in his leathern gizzard tickling him with the notion that the people are fed and that he helps.

Mrs. Seabury expressed anxiety about Sylvia and Jack, and made me promise to take care that they should not neglect to eat. She even suggested

certain dishes suitable to their tastes and the occasion. It appeared that she had not asked Jack to dine with her because of Quinn.

"I didn't like to antagonize Quinn by shutting him out," she said, "and I couldn't have him here while I was telephoning."

As for Sylvia, she had refused to leave Alice.

"Sylvia was very fond of her," said Mrs. Seabury simply; and two minutes later she asked me searchingly what I believed to have been Sylvia's motive for remaining upon the scene.

"I think you have stated it," said I. "They were friends, and Sylvia will not desert her."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Seabury; "yes, I understand her feeling perfectly." A pause. "But what I'm trying to get at is the reason why she stayed. However, I think it's just as well that she should be there; we can be sure about what happens."

"I will go to her," said I. "She ought not to be alone."

"Yes," she responded. "Go to her, and tell her not to worry. I am attending to her safety."

"I think she oughtn't to answer questions," said I. "I'll tell her not to say too much."

"Well," returned Mrs. Seabury, "as to that, I'm not at all disturbed. Let her talk, if she wants to; she'll do no harm. Sylvia has a certain depth, more than you suppose, Arthur. She's a good deal deeper than you are. Watch your own tongue, in case you know anything."

"I don't," said I.

"That's fortunate," she said. "They'd be likely to get it out of you. But I don't know that it matters, so long as you don't repeat what I tell you, and I'll do you the justice to say that you've always been good about that."

At this there came a knock upon the door, and Jack entered. Mrs. Seabury noticed and understood the quick glance that he cast about the room.

"Whom are you looking for?" she asked.

"I wasn't exactly looking for any

one," he answered, as if a trifle disconcerted by her abrupt question. "I supposed that Dalton would be here, and he isn't. That's all."

I also had remarked the absence of the butler, but had taken it for granted that Mrs. Seabury had sent him upon some errand.

"It's very odd," said she. "I haven't seen Dalton since we arrived. Perhaps he has had some trouble with the baggage; I told him to see to that before doing anything else."

"I don't believe it's the baggage, Aunt Frances," said Jack. "I think it's Quinn."

"Do you mean that Quinn has carried him off to question him?" said I.

"Quite likely," remarked Mrs. Seabury.

"But, Aunt Frances," said Jack earnestly, "don't you think something ought to be done to protect him? Do any of us know where he was when this crime was committed? If he can't prove where he was, he'll be in a mighty serious situation, it seems to me."

It flashed through my mind then, for the first time, that Dalton was the only person against whom a direct and simple motive for this deed could be alleged. In the early days of Alice's residence in our house, Dalton had misunderstood her position, not without excuse. She certainly seemed to have been engaged as Mrs. Seabury's secretary; Dalton saw her daily employed in that capacity. He was an ambitious fellow, making random attempts at self-education, cherishing in his heart some legend of descent from noble personages, and altogether very much of a dreamer. Doubtless he saw no impassable gulf between himself and the new toiler who had appeared in our household. Love is a crazy counselor, and Dalton was in very poor condition to resist its promptings. The nervous strain of serving Mrs. Seabury had already worn him lean, and made his eyes to glare in his face like those of one who has been watchful for long hours at a post of peril. He was precisely the man to lose his heart and

his wits at the same time, and that was what happened.

In his avowal to Alice he must have been happily inspired; for, though it was exactly the occurrence best calculated to humiliate the girl and drive her to some hasty act of cruelty, she seemed to feel only kindness toward the man. She would not hurt him needlessly or impair his prospects in life; justice, and compassion, and an exquisite tact governed her conduct, and it is but fair to say that Dalton also bore himself very well. Thus the natural consequences of the man's folly were averted; he remained in his place, and did not err again. Yet the secret could not be kept. The servants knew it; there could be no doubt that it would come to the surface in the investigation of Alice's death, and would be seized upon by the police and by the press. As Jack had said, Dalton was in danger unless he could clearly prove the physical impossibility of his guilt.

"This strikes me as serious," said I. "We must remember, Jack, that your revolver has disappeared. Presumably it was the weapon used, and Dalton might have got it out of your bag."

"No, no," Jack protested. "You're entirely mistaken. The weapon is the very thing that will acquit us all. It wasn't my revolver that was used, and the bullet will prove it, when it's found."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"Why, we didn't any of us do it," he replied, "and nobody else could have got the revolver. I should think that settled it. But of course we want to avoid trouble and a cloud of random suspicions. If a person is arrested for murder, it usually means a long imprisonment, guilty or innocent, and we're just as much bound to protect Dalton as ourselves. That's why we all ought to get together, and decide upon some policy."

Mrs. Seabury compressed her thin lips in a sort of smile, and looked at Jack with narrowed eyes.

"The policy has been decided upon," said she. "Don't bother your head about it."

"But what are we to do?" he cried.

"You're to rely upon me," responded Mrs. Seabury, "all three of you, just as you've always done. It'll be strange if I'm not a match for a crossroads coroner and a chief of police out of a comic opera. Now leave me alone to think about it, and as you go out, tell the waiter to come in and get these things."

We departed accordingly, and in the hall I asked Jack what he proposed to do.

"I'm going to hunt up Dalton," he replied. "His absence has a mighty queer look to me. Not that I suspect him; not a bit of it, but—well, where is he? That's what I'd like to know."

He hurried away upon this business with his usual air of concentrated energy, while I turned toward the room where Sylvia kept watch beside her friend. There was no longer any guard outside the door, but there were two within, one of whom asked my name when I rapped, and presently admitted me.

Alice's body had been laid upon a couch, and was now to the eye only an outline under a white covering, impressing the mind by its vagueness and by the inimitable quietude of death. Beside a table in the centre of the room was a rigid old woman, busy with a needle. Sylvia, sitting on the floor, rested her head against this woman's knees. The worker paused for just an instant as I entered the room, and gave me a look, over the top of her spectacles, solemn and kindly. Her back was held as straight as a board, scorning the support of the chair, as her sturdy old soul scorned idleness even at such a time. She was Mrs. Hammond, the housekeeper, and she was stitching the crest of the hotel upon a towel. We had come to know and admire her in the previous season; she was without children or near kin except in the churchyard, without property, without prospects beyond her present humble toil, faithful in all things with the unswerving and precise integrity of an earlier era. I greeted her with affection, and she

showed a gentle pleasure, scanning me with motherly eyes to see if I were well; and when I had released her hand, she laid it for a moment upon Sylvia's head, before taking up her work again.

"If I had known that you were here I should have had less anxiety for Sylvia," said I.

"It seemed to be my place," she said, "as Mrs. Seabury had duties elsewhere."

"What have they done?" asked Sylvia. "Do they know—have they learned anything?"

"I have heard nothing," said I.

"The coroner was here—Doctor Ritter," said she. "He looked at her, and went away. Captain Quinn was here, too; he hunted for the bullet, but couldn't find it. He is coming back."

She extended a hand to me, and I assisted her to rise. A handkerchief slipped from her belt and slid along her skirt; it was knotted, and seemed to fall heavily. I stooped to pick it up, but she had only half risen, and with her disengaged hand she reached it where it lay. She thrust it back more securely under the belt.

As we stood face to face I noticed how pale she was. She seemed to stand weakly, and as she turned to walk toward a window, she put her hand suddenly upon my arm.

A policeman was sitting in a chair against the wall between the seaward windows; he was slouched down, his chin upon his breast, but his eyes were bright under his shaggy brows. He seemed to get the impression that Sylvia and I intended to go out upon the veranda.

"I beg pardon," said he, extending an arm into our path; "my orders are that nobody must go out of this room till the chief comes back."

"Why is that?" I demanded. "What right has he to give such an order?"

"I don't know," answered the man, with a profound simplicity.

"I guess he's coming now," said the policeman at the door, and we all heard voices in the hall.

Some one knocked, with three soft

taps; the door was opened, and Quinn came slowly in, followed by two men in uniform and one in workman's dress, who carried an electric-light bulb attached to a wire, which, at a sign from Quinn, he fastened upon the chandelier so that the lamp glowed in his hand.

"They will search for the bullet," whispered Sylvia in my ear. "Will they find it?"

"Why, certainly," I answered. "It must be here."

"And then?" she breathed.

"Then," said I, "we shall know whether it came from Jack's pistol."

"Can they tell surely? Will—"

She ceased, for Quinn had turned toward us.

"Miss Leland, don't be alarmed," said he, with his gentlest manner. "There isn't going to be anything startling. We're only going to make a bit of a search."

"I understand," said she steadily. "I am not easily frightened."

"I thought you looked a bit qualmish," he responded, "and no wonder. This has been a bad piece of work here, one of the worst in my time, and very mysterious, too. But when we have turned up this bullet—" He finished the sentence with a gesture that may have meant much to himself, but was beyond my reading.

At his direction the electrician threw the light upon the opposite wall, Quinn taking a range from the window by which Sylvia and I were standing, across the spot where Alice was supposed to have stood. It seemed from this that the bullet, if not deflected, should have struck the wall near the bedroom door, and Quinn proceeded to examine that part of the room with close attention, assisted by his men.

Sylvia and I were left to ourselves; there was a constant murmur of voices on the other side, and we could speak together in low tones without fear of being overheard.

"Arthur," said she, "if suspicion should point strongly toward some one—I mean one of us—say it were Jack

—we would be loyal; we would not desert him?”

“Desert Jack?” said I. “No, never in the world.”

“But suppose we were not quite sure,” she persisted. “Suppose it seemed almost as if he must have done it, and yet not guiltily—through some error, some dreadful error or misfortune. We would be true to him, you and I? We have been so close together, we three; like brothers and a sister. I think that each of us ought to feel secure in the others, ought to be able to trust in their love, in their loyalty which nothing, nothing whatever, could shake. Don’t you feel so?”

It may have been the quality of her tone that made her seem so strange to me. I had never heard Sylvia speak like that; naturally, for there had never been an occasion. Her voice was softer than a whisper; it seemed just to touch me and to go no farther. There was an intimate sweetness in the sound, secret and thrilling; it was like the pressure of a soft hand in the dance, under the eyes of many, delicate almost beyond perception and infinitely daring. A host of vague sensory impressions clouded my intelligence, a nameless pleasurable emotion. I felt my heart beating hard, and the hot blood in my face; but suddenly, remembering the presence of the dead, I was ashamed. A sharer in the common ignorance of all that appertains to love, I did not know that it is natural kin with grief and with the awe of death; and so it happened that the first real tenderness I ever felt for Sylvia, the beginning of love after all those years of comradeship, seemed to me to be a kind of sin allied to madness.

“You haven’t answered me,” said Sylvia.

“I think I do not altogether understand you, Sylvia,” said I. “What do you want me to do, or say? It isn’t Jack you’re thinking of; he’s safe enough. Who is in danger? Some one you care for?”

She gave me a startled look, rapid and searching; and at that a thought went through my mind with a pang.

“Not Clinton?” said I. “You spoke only of ourselves; yet, if he were anything to you——”

“He isn’t,” said she. “I wasn’t thinking of him.”

She came closer to me; her cheek almost touched my shoulder, and she spoke in that incredibly soft tone, but with immeasurable intensity:

“Arthur, suppose that it were I. If I had done this without wrong, without intent to harm any one—what would you do? Above all, what would you counsel me to do? Should I sink into mere desperation? Should I destroy my life? If—if there were any one who loved me, should I break his heart with my despair, or should I rather summon all my courage, and go on—for his sake?”

“You would come to me,” said I, “to me alone. We two would bear it together. If no good could come of telling, we would hold the secret, and fight down the memory; and you would live your life——”

She clasped my hand hard.

“We two, alone!” she said. “Oh, how I wanted to hear that! Never, never forget what you have said. Arthur, it’s a pledge to me; it’s your soul’s honor.”

“Be it so,” said I, “and none the less sacred because I don’t in the least understand.”

“No, no, you don’t,” she said. “Not in the least; and it’s better that you shouldn’t. But you have bound yourself to me. Do you believe now that I did this?”

“No,” said I. “You think yourself indirectly and innocently responsible, and you are probably mistaken.”

She studied my face for a moment.

“You have still Doctor Clinton in your mind,” said she. “You think that his connection with my secret led to this. Do you condemn him?”

“No,” said I. “I imagine him to be a part of your theory of this crime, which I believe to be all wrong.”

“I devoutly hope so,” she replied, “but I’ll not tell you what it is, and you’ll not ask. Oh, do you know that I am happy? You have made me so,

and it's not right; but I had no control of myself. I had been shaken to the soul. All seems unreal. Look!" And she pointed to the dark forms grouped about the slowly moving light.

Quinn, who was standing in a chair, passing the light carefully along the heavy moulding over the bedroom door, suddenly uttered a grunting cry, and laid his finger on a certain spot.

"There's where it hit," he said, looking down upon his men. "And it didn't stick. It must be on the floor."

He stepped down, bearing the light, and began to search from the corner outward, while his men stood in a curved line from wall to wall, crouching and intent.

"Hold me by the arm," whispered Sylvia. "I am faint. I must go out into the open air." But as she turned toward the window, one of the men—the same that had checked us before—glanced over his shoulder toward us and then shook his head.

Sylvia stopped, and stood erect with a gesture signifying acquiescence. For some seconds she was still, except for the trembling which I could feel; and I knew that she was in the act of decision.

"What is it, Sylvia?" I whispered, but she made no answer. She took a step sidewise toward the closed door between that room and the one which was to have been occupied by Alice. This door was near the head of the couch where the girl's body now lay; it was between the couch and the seaward wall of the room. In the corner stood the table upon which Jack had set his things, close by the window through which the fatal shot must have been fired. Thus the table was in a diagonal line from the window to the door, and within reach of either.

Sylvia moved a step at a time until she was close by that door. I saw her lay a hand upon the knob. At this moment Quinn desisted from his search.

"It's not here," he said. "Somebody's got it. The way that it hit, it couldn't

have bounced back any distance. The one that's got it is the party we're looking for, I guess."

"Nobody's taken it since I've been here," said the man who had been on guard at the door; but the other who had sat between the windows said something which I could not hear, whereupon Quinn stepped out from the group toward me.

"Mr. Seabury," said he, "I've known you a year or two. You're a sensible young man, if ever I saw one, and if a thing has got to be done, in the interests of justice, even though it isn't pleasant or agreeable, you're not the man to stand in the way—"

"What are you driving at?" said I sharply. "Do you want to search me?"

He hesitated; glanced at Sylvia, and then at Mrs. Hammond. I read his thoughts like a printed page; he would have Mrs. Hammond search Sylvia.

"Captain Quinn," I began, with no other thought than to gain time; but, before I could proceed, we heard Jack's voice at the door.

"I am glad you have come, Jack," said I. "Captain Quinn has been hunting for the bullet without success. He thinks some one has taken it, and he proposes that Sylvia and I should permit some sort of search."

"Strictly for your own protection," Quinn said quickly. "Somebody's taken it. You don't want suspicion to rest upon you. Miss Leland, for instance, hasn't been out of this room since the crime was committed."

"It won't be necessary to search any one," said Jack quietly. "I found the bullet. It was my intention to give it to Mrs. Seabury, but, in view of the present situation, I shall intrust it to Chief Quinn. Here it is."

He took it from his waistcoat pocket, wrapped in white tissue paper, and put it into the officer's hand.

"Well," said Quinn, struggling to assume the manner of one whom nothing can surprise, "now I guess we ought to feel a little solid ground under our feet, and know where we stand."

What the Editor has to say

BY this time you have read the first installment of Howard Fielding's mystery story, "The Great Conspirator." We hope that you like it as much as we did, and we are reasonably confident that you do. You will find succeeding installments even more interesting. Have you any idea who fired the fatal shot? Have you any idea for whom it was intended? If you think you can solve the mystery before the end of the story, we should be glad to hear from you. When we read the story, we had no idea as to how it really happened until the author told us himself.

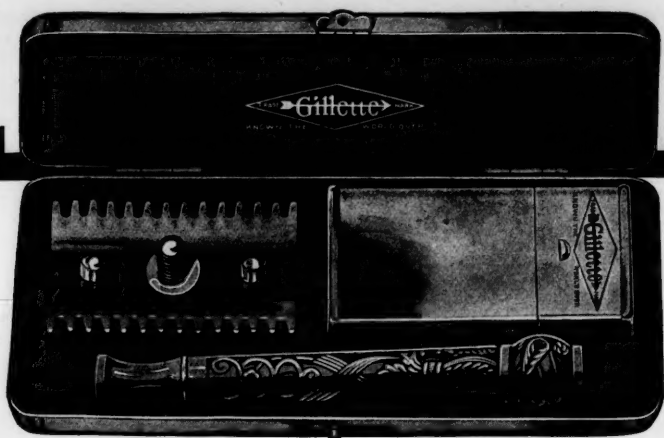
WE wanted to give you a generous portion in the first installment of the serial, and you see that we have done so—something in the neighborhood of twenty-five thousand words. Owing to that fact, we had to crowd out two short stories that we promised to publish this month. One is "In the Church," by Edward Boltwood; the other is "The Greenhorn and the Ambassador," by Edward Lucas White. They will both appear in the October number of SMITH'S. They are such good stories, each in its own way, that they are worth waiting for.

ARE you at all interested in co-educational schools and colleges? They furnish a problem in American life that is new with this generation. Perhaps you know some boy or girl at Leland Stanford, or Oberlin, or Cornell. When young people, hundreds of them, boys and girls ranging from seventeen to twenty-one or two, are thrown in close proximity in the classroom and socially for the

better part of four years, there is sure to be matter of interest for the writer. The complete novel in the October SMITH'S, "The Making of Dick Larrabee," has for its scene a co-educational college. We won't tell you which of the colleges it is; but the scenes and characters are drawn directly from life, and it is just possible that some one may identify the place. The story was written by Emma Lee Walton, who wrote "The Uses of Adversity," which appeared some months ago as a complete novel in SMITH'S, and which is to be published shortly in book form. "The Making of Dick Larrabee" is a splendid story, with the same strong interest and fascination which attracted the attention of so many people to "The Uses of Adversity."

VIRGINIA MIDDLETON, with whose work you are already familiar, has written a clever little monologue for the October SMITH'S—"The Country Mouse Visits the Metropolis." It is interesting and entertaining, with plenty of wit and humor.

THERE will be another funny story by Holman F. Day in the October SMITH'S, another splendid mystery story dealing with the adventures of "The Cowboy Countess," by C. N. and A. M. Williamson, and another musical article by Rupert Hughes. Also, there will be another installment of "The Confessions of a Stenographer," by Anne O'Hagan. We have no more space, but we just want to tell you, before we say good-by for a month, to be sure to look for Grace Margaret Gallaher's story, "From the River's Edge," in next month's issue.



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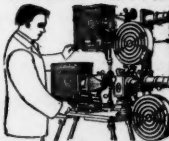
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